

**An exploration of why learning English for
twelve years in Omani public schools is
inadequate preparation for Omani students
entering Higher Education.**

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my 14 Moons. Without their support and prayers, this work would never have been finished.

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Abstract

The transition from secondary school to higher education can prove challenging for many students as they are frequently expected to adapt to different styles of education. Several researchers (Byrne & Flood, 2005; Hillman, 2005) have already investigated the different factors that can smooth or hinder progress in higher education. Students' lack of preparation for higher education study is a global phenomenon, discussed by both national and international researchers (Al-Mamari, 2012; Dzubak, 2015; Jones, 2007; Oxford Business Group, 2013; Sheard, Lowe, Nicholson, & Ceddia, 2003; Yusuf, 2005). This research explores Omani diploma students' transition to higher education with a focus on the obstacles that hinder students' attainment of high marks in the Omani higher education institutions' (HEI) English language placement test. Of particular interest for this research is to better understand the underlying conditions of the inadequate schooling, where English language is studied for 12 years, which are only remedied by completing the additional English foundation programme, to enable pursuit of studies at higher education level.

A sequential mixed method approach was adopted to document the perspectives and experiences of those directly involved: first-year students who have completed a foundation programme (N= 168), Post-Basic Education teachers (grades 11–12) (N= 12) and Language Centre teachers at a university (N= 4). In the present study, I used two instruments, namely the interviews and the questionnaire. The findings of the study indicate that the inadequate preparation of students can be explained in the light of two main factors: teachers performance (exam-oriented approach to teaching and concern with following a rigid syllabus) and lack of institutional dialogue between post-secondary and higher education teaching staff.

The findings of the present study may contribute to informing changes to the pre-service training programmes of English teachers at higher education institutions. Besides, the outcomes of the present study may serve to encourage better communication between schools and higher education institutions.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

English has become the medium of instruction in higher education institutions in Oman, as is the case in many Gulf countries, such as Bahrain, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (Ahmed & Vig, 2010; Al-Bakri, 2013). This widespread introduction of English as the medium of instruction is intended to establish an international standard in higher education to ensure a higher education standard that meets the requirements of the 21st century (Baporikar & Shah, 2012; Brandenburg, 2012). This situation raises several issues, one of which is students' lack of preparedness to pursue studies at the higher education level due to their low level of English language proficiency. This low level of English proficiency hinders their classroom participation and constrains their achievement.

English, in Oman, is taught from Grade 1 to Grade 12 in all Basic Education schools. Even so, students lack the proficiency in English required to pursue studies at HE level. They, therefore, require a foundation programme to reinforce and improve their English Language proficiency. Thus, the goal of the present study is to explore what are a) the Omani university students' b) Post Basic Education Teachers' and c) Language Center teachers' beliefs about why learning English for twelve years in Omani public schools is inadequate preparation for Omani students to pursue studies at higher education level. The present study answers this question by exploring the beliefs of three major stakeholders,

the Omani university students, and the Post Basic Education teachers and Language Center teachers. Because this study focuses on the Sultanate of Oman, it is essential to understand the educational system of Oman.

1.2 Education in the Sultanate of Oman

As a developing country in the Middle East, the Sultanate of Oman encounters many challenges caused by social needs, economic demands, rapidly developing technology and globalisation. The challenges of globalisation have not only influenced trade and industry, but they have also shaped the educational system, which in turn is supporting development in other areas of society (Al-Nabhani, 2007; Issan& Gomaa, 2010).

Oman's educational system has undergone rapid change, marked by different phases. The first phase, in the 1960s, was limited to Quranic Schools or 'Kuttab' (non-formal education) (Al-Nabhani, 2007; Al-Najar, 2016a). Omani children used to learn only the Holy Quran, Arabic and mathematics in mosques, at teachers' houses, and under the shade of trees. The second phase of education development began in 1970, when formal schools were built, and teachers were recruited from neighbouring countries. An emphasis was placed on the quantity of schools at this stage. The Ministry of Education was concerned with building more schools as the population increased. In the third phase of development, beginning in the 1980s, the Ministry of Education placed greater emphasis on the quality of teaching and training by promoting the implementation of new pedagogical approaches and reforming the curriculum.

In 1998, the Basic Education System (BES) replaced the General Education System (GES), which focused on memorizing and drilling (Ahmed & Vig, 2010; Al-Kharusi & Atweh, 2008; Al-Nabhani, 2007; Al-Najar, 2016a; Rassekh, 2004) and on teacher-centred approaches (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2010). Basic Education at schools lasts for ten years. After successful completion of grade 10 students move to Post-Basic Education, which includes grades 11 and 12. After 12 years, students graduate with a Diploma that enables them to pursue their higher education at different institutions (Figure 1).

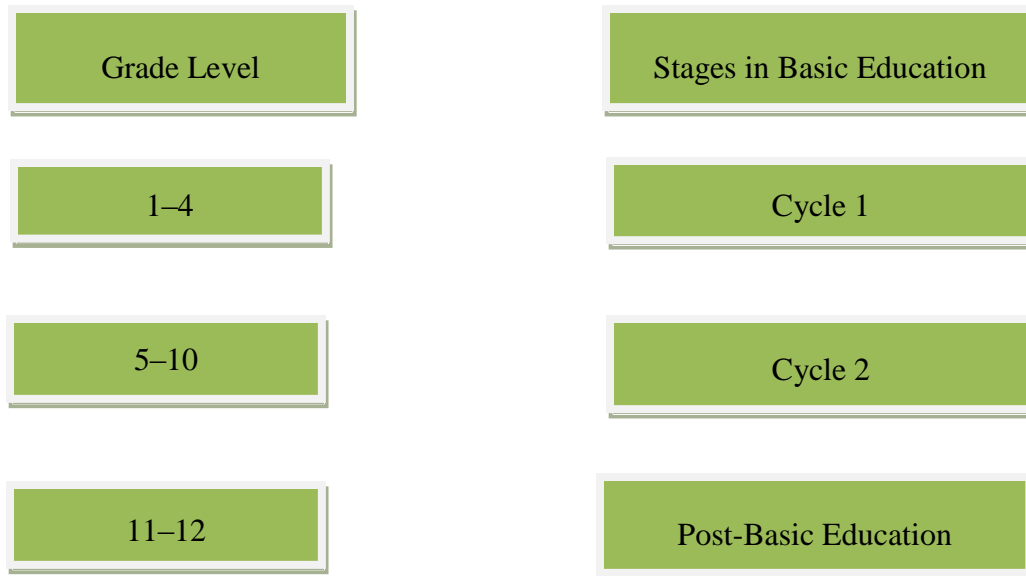


Figure 1: Oman's Basic Education System (adapted from the *National Report on Quality Education in Oman*, Ministry of Education, Oman, 2004)

To achieve international higher education standards, all public and private higher education institutions in the Sultanate of Oman adopted standard curricula, recruited experienced faculty from countries around the world, and from 1970 they began using English as the language of instruction (Al-Bakri, 2013; Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012; Baporikar & Shah, 2012). Among the basic education objectives stated by the Ministry of Education are the goals of promoting students' English language acquisition and increasing their preparedness for the requirements of higher education (Sivaraman, Al Balushi, & Rao, 2014) and the labour market (Al-Najar, 2016b; Issan & Gomaa, 2010).

Additionally, Oman's Ministry of Higher Education (MHE) established an affiliation system through which all private higher education colleges and universities establish partnership agreements with highly reputable universities to monitor and improve the quality of higher education in the country. This agreement requires the use of English as the language of instruction in all private colleges and universities (Brandenburg, 2012, p. 142). The Oman Accreditation Council (OAC), established in 2001, was replaced by the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA) in 2010 to develop international standards for higher education institutions and programmes (see the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority, 2017).

1.2.1 The assessment system in Post-Basic Education Schools in Oman

The academic year in the schools is divided into two semesters. At the end of each semester, students sit for a formal semester test which is centrally prepared and administered by the MOE for the entire country. It covers five domains: listening, grammar, vocabulary, reading, and writing, as shown in Table 1. Speaking is not included in this test, for reasons of time and practicality (Ministry of Education, 2016). This decision (not including speaking in the test) could be one of the reasons why oral skills have tended to be poorly served in classrooms. Consequently, this has an impact on students' presentation and oral skills when they transit to higher education levels, where these skills are essential. Many teachers award speaking marks only for class participation. In my opinion, stakeholders in the assessment department need to rethink this decision as it results in "teaching to the test" (Ministry of Education & World Bank, 2012, p. 31).

Table 1: Assessment and weighting of English skills in grades 11 and 12 (Ministry of Education, 2016)

	GRADE 11			GRADE 12		
Elements	Continuous assessment (CA)	Semester test (SMTs)	Total	Continuous assessment (CA)	Semester test (SMTs)	Total
Listening	-----	15%	15%	-----	15%	15%
Speaking	20%	-----	20%	15%	-----	15%
Reading	5%	20%	25%	5%	25%	30%
Writing	10%	15%	25%	10%	20%	30%
Vocabulary & Grammar	5%	10%	15%	-----	10%	10%
Total	40%	60%	100%	30% *	70%	100%

*portfolio marks

As the above table shows, the semester test in grade 11 accounts for 60% of the total mark and 40% of the mark is awarded for continuous assessment, whereas in grade 12, the semester test is worth 70% of the overall mark and 30% of the mark is awarded for continuous assessment. Teachers assess students by using different tools such as short informal quizzes, projects (making a poster about a friend's hobbies, designing a healthy lunch box, designing a robot and writing a diary) and presentations. In grade 12, students' work and activities are put in a file called the student's portfolio, which is checked by the moderation committee before the semester test starts.

The portfolio represents an ongoing collection of work completed by the student. It provides concrete evidence of each student's learning, and of the type and level of work that he or she has done. It should comprise a selection of different work, and be representative of what the student has achieved. All five domains (listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar and vocabulary) should be systematically included (Ministry of Education, 2016). In grade 11, the reading, writing, grammar and vocabulary domains are assessed by using both continuous assessment (CA) and the semester test. However, speaking is assessed only through CA and listening only through the semester test. On the other hand, in grade 12, only reading and writing are evaluated by both CA and the semester test, whereas listening is only assessed via the semester test and speaking only through CA, as demonstrated in Table 1.

1.3 Transition to higher education

The transition from Post-Basic Education to higher education institutions is not effortless; it proves challenging for many students as they are frequently expected to adapt to different styles of learning (Byrne & Flood, 2005; Hillman, 2005; Sheard et al. 2003). Culture, socioeconomic background and social class status (Cause, 2010; Guzman, Garza, & Wu, 2015; McEwan, 2015; Montero, 2014), as well as prior educational experience (Byrne & Flood, 2005), are among the other factors that influence students' transition to higher education (HE). This transition may require learners to reorganise different aspects of their lives, their behaviour, expectations and learning styles (Kantanis, 2000; McEwan, 2015; Montero, 2014; Sheard et al., 2003). For

instance, differences between school and higher education environments require students to adjust to new teaching and learning strategies, which may be radically different from those that they have experienced at schools (Al Seyabi&Tuzlukova, 2014; Sheard et al., 2003).

Another challenge may be students' inappropriate choices of programmes or courses which do not match their expectations and abilities. Such a situation might occur because as, Peel claims (cited in Sheard et al., 2003, p. 167), "students often receive conflicting advice from parents, teachers, friends and careers advisors". Many students also find higher education to be an isolating experience because they miss the close contact with their teachers and colleagues encountered in the school environment.

In this regard, Kantanis (2000) explains that, "adjusting to the life and culture of university usually takes time and effort due to the considerable differences between the educational environments of secondary school and the university and the experiential nature of transition" (p. 105). Omani Post-Basic Education students are no exception with regards to encountering challenges when transitioning to higher education environments (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012; Al-Mamari, 2012; Al-Najar, 2016b; Al-Seyabi&Tuzlukova, 2014; Issan& Gomaa, 2010; Oxford Business Group, 2013; Sergon, 2011). Al-Seyabi and Tuzlukova (2014) claim that "first-year students find themselves in a position where they need to acquire a broad range of skills to help them adapt to university life and become adjusted to new requirements of their academic courses" (p. 37). English language competency represents one of the most common and significant challenges faced by Omani Post-Basic Education students from public schools.

1.4 English as the medium of instruction

English is the most widely spoken language in the world. It is considered as a universal language and a foremost criterion when applying for jobs in companies or seeking admission into reputable colleges and universities(Al Jadidi, 2009; Yahya, 2012; Cholakova, 2015). The English language is the main medium of computers and the

Internet. Both have become indispensable mediators for human communication (Yahya, 2012).

According to Hasman (cited in Yahya, 2012, p. 119), over 1.4 billion people live in countries where English has official status. Over 70% of the world's scientists read English, over 85% of the world's mail is written in English, and 90% of the information in the world's electronic retrieval system is stored in English. Therefore, most countries, including Oman, have determined to include English as a major and compulsory subject in schools and to change the language of instruction in higher education institutions to English. This has been done with the intention of meeting global standards, as we are living in a world of globalisation (Al Jadidi, 2009; Yahya, 2012). In the Omani context (Al Jadidi, 2009; Yahya, 2012; Issan& Gomaa, 2010; Sergon, 2011) the Sultanate "is one of many rapidly developing countries whose economies require increasing numbers of English speakers in the light of the global spread of English in recent decades (Al Jadidi, 2009,p.20).

Because the Omani government recognizes that English is a very important international language for modernization, and a tool for participating in a multicultural society as well as in the globalized world, a great portion of Oman's resources are allocated to the teaching and learning of English in schools from grade 1, and also in higher education institutions (HEIs) (Al-Bulushi& Al-Issa, 2017; Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012; Al-Issa, Al-Bulushi, & Al-Zadjali, 2017; Al-Mahrooqi& Denman, 2016; Sergon, 2011). English is the language of instruction at Omani HEIs, but many students fail to function well, academically, without a foundation programme (Al-Murshidi, 2014; Sivaraman et al., 2014). Inadequate preparation and lack of English language competency diminish students' opportunities to further their studies and succeed in the workplace, as most Omani private and oil companies prefer bilingual candidates (Arabic and English) (Al-Jadidi, 2009; Issan& Gomaa, 2010; Sergon, 2011).

Recent studies and reports reveal the scope of this problem in Oman. A report was written by the Oxford Business Group, entitled *Oman: Budget Boost for Education* (2013), highlights a lack of English knowledge as the main issue faced by students at

Sultan Qaboos University (SQU). According to this report, “[a] two-year study conducted by the university found that just 14% of new students in 2011 achieved a pass mark in the English language test, and a considerable number perform less than satisfactorily in foundation programme placement tests”. These findings are confirmed by Al-Mamari’s (2012) study, revealing that more than 80% of Omani diploma students spend at least one semester completing additional foundation programme in English because they do not score at the required level to pursue studies in higher education institutions.

1.5 Rationale of the study

Students’ lack of preparedness for higher education is a global phenomenon that has been discussed by both national and international researchers (Al-Mamari, 2012; Dzubak, 2015; Jones, 2007; Oxford Business Group, 2013; Sheard et al., 2003; Yusuf, 2005). The results of some studies indicate that the transition from schools to higher education institutions is challenging, and it is necessary to understand these dynamics from students’ perspectives (Byrne & Flood, 2005; Chidzonga, 2014; Hillman, 2005; Tate & Swords, 2012). Concerning the issues faced by students in association with the adoption of English as the medium of instruction in higher education, previous studies have examined this phenomenon from only the students’ perspectives. As an English senior supervisor my responsibilities include (1) mentoring and training senior teachers, (2) observing teachers at all levels (C1, C2 and Post-Basic Education) and with different experiences, with focus on those who are weak or new (3) conducting mini-workshops for novice teachers at the beginning of the year to familiarize them with the Basic Education System, and more specifically with the three ‘common message systems’ that integrate Bernstein’s code theory: curriculum, assessment and pedagogy (Cause, 2010), and (4) meeting regularly with supervisors and trainers. I intended to explore the perspectives of not only students but also teachers concerning the reasons for this additional language learning requirement because the teacher is “the most important person in the curriculum implementation process” (AlSubaie, 2016, p. 1).

Therefore, as a researcher, the most appropriate way to collect data is to explore the beliefs of the three main stakeholders involved. Only by approaching the teachers, both Post Basic Education and Language Centre teachers and by collecting information from students themselves, can the apparent gap in the empirical literature be filled. Previous research in this area did not include all three stakeholders. This might have led to a biased and incomplete view of the phenomenon under investigation. To overcome the weakness or intrinsic biases that can result from using only one research method (Rahman & Yeasmin, 2012), and to gain a complete view of the phenomenon, the present study has been an attempt to broaden the source, at the core level, by the inclusion of all stakeholders.

Exploring the reasons behind students' unpreparedness from different perspectives and considering how these reasons might relate to the three 'common message systems' (curriculum, assessment and pedagogy) will hopefully narrow the gap between the micro-level (how the teachers transmit the content through pedagogy and assessment) in the schools and the macro-level; that is the expectations of higher education institutions.

My main goal was therefore to investigate, from the perspectives of the different actors directly involved – students, Post-Basic Education teachers and higher education Language Centre teachers – why the Omani Basic Education system, which aims to prepare students for lifelong studies in higher education and the job market (Ahmed & Vig, 2010), has not succeeded in enabling Omani Diploma holders to enter higher education institutions without failing the placement test (in the sense that they do not meet university or college requirements) (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012; Al-Mamari, 2012; Sergon, 2011), thus having to complete the foundation programme in English that is aimed at preparing them to pursue studies at Higher education level. This investigation would hopefully provide a wider perspective of the phenomenon, given that teachers have a great influence on students' learning, motivation, achievement and acquisition of life-long learning skills (Aliakbari, Parvin, Heidari, & Haghani, 2015; Braungart & Braungart, 2008; Ertmer & Newby, 1993; Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007; Olusegun, 2015).

Whereas the previous studies that have addressed students' difficulties regarding the use of English language in higher education have adopted either a quantitative or qualitative methodological approach, my study aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under analysis by building on different sets of data through the adoption of a mixed-methods research design (Creswell, 2006a; Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007).

Furthermore, previous studies were conducted by instructors from higher education institutions (Al-Mahrooqi, 2012; Al-Najar, 2016b; Al-Seyabi&Tuzlokova, 2014; Sergon, 2011), whereas my study was conducted by a senior English language supervisor who has worked in the field of education for more than 25 years.

1.6 Purpose of the study and expected outcomes

As stated above, the present study seeks to uncover the reasons why learning English for twelve years in Omani public schools is inadequate preparation for Omani students to pursue studies at higher education level building on the perspectives of those directly involved - university students, Post-Basic Education teachers and Language Centre teachers.

As a researcher and senior supervisor of English language programmes in Omani public schools, I hope that this study will make a significant contribution by suggesting possible ways to close, or at least narrow, the gap between the skills and language competencies that students acquire in Basic and Post-Basic Education schools and those required to succeed in higher education. In the interviews, both Post Basic Education and Language Center teachers indicated their willingness to have a contact, or dialogue, through which they could discuss issues related to students' needs, the curriculum, and pedagogical concerns.

1.7 Methodological approach

The small number of previous studies that aimed to address the issue under consideration in the particular context of Oman has been mainly concerned with describing the

difficulties that students encountered in their transition from public school to higher education, and mostly in quantitative terms (Al-Mahrooqi& Denman, 2016; Al-Najar 2016b; Al-Seyabi&Tuzlukova, 2014). The problems encountered in working in English have many consequences in terms of obstacles to learning and extensions of the time needed for students to complete higher education degrees, as well as associated implications for access to the labour market.

Therefore, for the purposes of the present study, and given the complexity of the phenomenon under investigation, the present study used a mixed methods QUAL-quant exploratory sequential design (Creswell, 2006a; Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). By combining both qualitative and quantitative data collected from different sources, this approach provides an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon as it is perceived by students, Post-Basic Education teachers, and teachers at the Language Centre.

1.8 Definition of key concepts

Some terms and concepts used in this study can be used interchangeably, but may have different associations. Providing clear definitions of such terms and concepts is necessary because it is important that they are understood in the context of the present study.

- Post-Basic Education

Post-Basic Education is a two-year programme of education that pupils undertake after completing 10 years of Basic Education. The Post-Basic Education programme is designed to continue the development of basic skills for employment and career planning (Al-Jardani, 2012; Al-Najar, 2016a; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2010).

- The foundation programme

The foundation programme is a programme designed at all higher education institutions. Each institution has its own foundation programme in English. It aims to improve students' English language proficiency, reinforce their knowledge of basic mathematics,

consolidate knowledge of basic applications of computer science, and integrate necessary study skills (Al-Busaidi & Tuzlukova, 2013; Al-Lawati, 2002; Al-Seyabi & Tuzlukova, 2014).

1.9 The context of the research

To achieve the goals of the research and uncover the main reasons why learning English for twelve years in Omani public schools is inadequate preparation for Omani students to pursue studies at higher education level, the study was located in two places: a university campus; and some Post-Basic Education schools (grades 11–12).

Study participants included three particular groups. The first group consisted of first-year students who had completed a Foundation programme and had gone through the Basic Education System in public schools from grades 1 to 12. It is important to listen to students' voices when aiming to improve their learning (Chidzonga, 2014; Groves & Welsh, 2010). Participants also included Omani and foreign Post-Basic Education teachers, because of their first-hand experience of working with Omani students; their knowledge of the English language and curriculum, and of the students' language capabilities. The third group of participants consisted of foreign and Omani Language Centre teachers because they teach an English foundation programme and have extensive knowledge of students' difficulties and needs in terms of English language skills.

1.9 The structure of the thesis

This thesis is divided into six chapters. Following the introduction, Chapter 2 establishes the theoretical bases of the empirical study. It addresses various epistemological and ontological principles that inform learning in general, as well as foreign language teaching and learning in particular. Besides, Chapter 2 provides the theoretical framework that encompasses many central topics more directly related to the specific aims of the present study. These topics include the use of English as a medium of

instruction in higher education institutions in the Sultanate of Oman, its effect on students' academic performance, and the main factors highlighted in the relevant empirical literature that influence students' performance and achievement at the higher education level. The literature review chapter discusses some factors contributing to students' unpreparedness for higher education level internationally and in the Omani context. It also highlights the body of literature exploring this issue, particularly in relation to how unpreparedness might contribute to the experiences of those students who make the transition from school to a higher education context.

Chapter 3 discusses the methodology used in the study. Mixed methods design is the third major research approach or paradigm, after qualitative and quantitative designs. It involves the collection and analysis of data, as well as a mixture of both the qualitative and quantitative approaches to better understand a research problem or phenomenon (Creswell, 2009; Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007; Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtler, 2006). The study was conducted in two phases. Phase I adopted a qualitative design, in which a group of students, Post-Basic Education teachers, and Language Centre teachers were interviewed. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013) was conducted to analyse the interview data while thematic coding of the data identified the following themes: teachers' role, students' previous learning, assessment, and social dialogue. Phase II followed a quantitative design and included a questionnaire administered to a group of students who had finished a Foundation programme at their university. The questionnaire had three parts, including general demographic questions seeking the students' points of view about why learning English for twelve years in Omani public schools is inadequate preparation for Omani students to pursue studies at higher education level.

Chapter 4 is concerned with the data analysis and presentation of findings. It was hoped that mixing the two datasets collected at each phase of the study would provide a better understanding of the phenomenon under scrutiny. The analysis of the qualitative data in Phase I revealed five main themes as follows: (1) teachers' roles, (2) students' previous learning experience, (3) syllabus, (4) assessment, and (5) social dialogue. The analysis of the quantitative data in Phase II led to the identification of only two factors.

Chapter 5 discusses the findings and pinpoints some reasons why Post-Basic Education students require a foundation programme. Each reason is discussed in detail, and issues are raised concerning the approaches to teaching and learning English at Basic and Post-Basic Education levels. Issues addressed include the training and professional development of English teachers in Oman, and the inter-institutional social dialogue between different educational organisations.

Chapter 6 focuses on the conclusions that can be drawn from the study. It presents a brief overview of the research goals and methodology used, and a summary of the main findings is then provided. Recommendations for future policy development in the light of the implications of the findings, the study's limitations, and suggestions for further research are also discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The key question for my research is why learning English for twelve years in Omani public schools is inadequate preparation for Omani students to pursue studies at higher education level. Several researchers (Al-Seyabi & Tuzlukova, 2014; Byrne & Flood, 2005; Guzman et al., 2015; Hillman, 2005) have agreed that students, in general, encounter various difficulties when they transition to higher education, albeit for different reasons. In this regard, Power, Robert, and Baker (cited in Sigei, 2007) have claimed:

At the higher education level, academics often complain about inadequacies in the backgrounds of school-leavers and their lack of commitment to their course. There are serious academic problems among the younger and academically less well motivated and prepared students; the most serious problems identified relate to the low course commitment and lack of preparation of younger students in non-professional courses. (p. 2)

Omani students are no exception. Apart from having to adapt to a new, different learning environment, new teaching approaches, and a different assessment system, they also encounter difficulties in transitioning to higher education because the language of study in higher education institutions is English rather than Arabic. In Oman, students learn English from grade 1 to grade 12, and yet, when they enter college or university, most of them have to take a foundation programme in English to pursue their higher education studies (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012; Al-Seyabi & Tuzlukova, 2014).

Thus, this chapter addresses the challenges that Omani students face when transitioning to higher education with a particular focus on the difficulties they face when English is used as the medium of instruction.

2.2 Key factors that contribute to students' unpreparedness for higher education.

Unpreparedness of students to successfully pursue higher education has been a topic of interest for both national and international researchers (Al Mamari, 2012; Dzubak, 2015; Jones, 2007; Oxford Business Group, 2013; Sheard et al., 2003; Yusuf, 2005) who attribute students' unpreparedness for higher education to a variety of factors. These factors are mainly related to the students' background and the teaching and learning environment. Several of these key factors can be contextualised within the framework of Bernstein's code theory.

2.2.1 Bernstein's code theory

Basil Bernstein was a British sociolinguist who introduced the code theory (restricted and elaborated to replace the formal and public languages,) in which he associated the use of language with social status. He claimed that working class people tend to use a restricted code, which involves simple terms and colloquial language and contains a myriad potential meaning, whereas middle-class people tend to use an elaborated code with longer and more complex sentences with universal and detailed description that allows speakers to make their ideas and intentions explicit. (Bernstein, 2003a; Bernstein, 2003b; Cause, 2010; Wei, 2014). In this regard, Bernstein (2003a) claimed that:

A restricted code can arise at any point in society where its conditions may be fulfilled, but a special case of this code will be that in which the speaker is limited to this code. This is the situation of members of the lower working class, including rural groups. An elaborated code is part of the life chance of members of the middle class; a middle-class individual has access to the two codes, a lower working class individual access to one. (p.85)

Wei (2014) claims that Bernstein's code theory is "one of the most influential theories in education and linguistic academia" (p.9) because it argues that schools influence students' values and practical views of the world. The three message systems that integrate the

code theory are present, in one way or another – depending on a number of factors such as, for example, the way of conceiving of teaching and learning - in all schools around the world (Cause, 2010). Bernstein claimed that social structure (especially social class) shapes educational phenomena (curriculum, pedagogy, teacher-student interaction), assessment, and how these reproduce social inequality (Bernstein, 2003a; Bernstein, 2003b). Bernstein defined curriculum as valid knowledge; pedagogy as valid transmission of knowledge and evaluation as the measurement of pupils' understanding of knowledge (Omar, 1999; Wyse, Pandya & Hayward, 2015).

However, it is important to note that teachers' views of teaching and learning and pedagogical approaches are, to a large extent, influenced and shaped by their previous experiences as learners and by their personal beliefs as professionals (Wyse, Pandya & Hayward, 2015).

It is important to note that Bernstein's restricted vs elaborated code theory does not apply to the Omani context because the Omani basic law guarantees that all citizens have the same civil rights and duties, which has contributed to mitigating any cleavages within the Omani society (Oman Country Report, 2018; Mattar, 2011). Besides, the Ministry of Education, in the Sultanate of Oman, provides free education for all the students in public schools (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2010). However, Bernstein's theory can be a promising line of enquiry into teachers' professional practice in dealing with student's individual needs. The findings of such research may inform teacher training programmes aimed at helping teachers to adopt approaches and strategies to best meet students' individual differences and needs, (Al-Maskri, Al-Mukhini & Amzat, 2012; Devery, 2015; Green, 2013; Ifunanya, Ngozi, & Roseline, 2013; Lal, 2016) especially in contexts characterized by relatively wide social class divisions.

2.2.2 Teachers' beliefs

Measuring teachers' beliefs is important as they play a key role in teachers' behaviour, classroom practices and professional development. Teachers' beliefs play an essential role in shaping their professional practice, that is their choices of teaching methods and their classroom decisions (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017). Thus, "beliefs about language learning have become one of researchers' interests in the field of second language acquisition" (Incecay & Dollar, 2011, p. 3395).

There is a strong relationship between the pedagogical beliefs of teachers, their planning for teaching, teaching decisions and classroom practices, methods and aims, and their planning. Ideally, teachers should be allocated an important role in the process of curriculum design. The teacher's role should go beyond the implementation and delivery of the curriculum; the role should extend to working as active planners, designers, coordinators, and decision-makers (Datnow, 2012). Gilakjani & Sabouri (2017) stated that teachers' beliefs guide and affect teaching strategies, classroom practice and students' achievement. For instance, if a teacher aims to teach language mainly for exam purposes this will have significant implications on the way he or she teaches; teaching will tend to be at the level of drilling and memorisation of grammatical rules and vocabulary.

On the other hand, if a teacher sees learning a new language as a tool for participating in a multicultural society as well as in the globalised world, then she or he will take different approaches to teach it. Thus it is essential for teachers to be familiar with different learning theories and implement these theories as they suit the class context and the students' needs (Altan, 2006; Al-Bulushi et al., 2017; Al-Mahrooqi and Denman, 2016; Al-Maskri et al., 2012; Mykrä, 2015; Randall & Cox, 2015). In this regard Xu (2012) stated,

When teachers believe that teaching well primarily depends on making school work interesting, they will reject as irrelevant parts of the course that focus on teaching students to use metacognitive strategies for reading to learn. When teachers believe that student's effort is the salient factor contributing to success as a learner, they will reject as irrelevant learning how to foster comprehension skills or how to help students develop study techniques specific to the subject matter they teach. When they believe all students will be like ourselves as able learners, they will find little reason to learn how to analyse the demands inherent to subject-matter texts, or how to mediate those demands with inexperienced and unskilled readers. ((p. 1399)

Teachers' beliefs are not always congruent with their behaviour. Teachers' beliefs can shape their espoused theories (Argyris, 1991); espoused theories, in turn, underpin and shape teachers' theories-in-use (Argyris, Putnam, & Smith, 1995) which inform their practice. For example, teachers' beliefs shape how they conceive of learning, which determines how they approach teaching to make teaching congruent with their views of learning. According to Incecay and Dollar (2011), a belief "is a mental state that is accepted as true by the person holding it, although the individual may know that alternative beliefs may be held by others" (p.3394).

Some researchers have claimed that beliefs are not always congruent with reality; they have different degrees of strength and are difficult to measure as they involve personal ideas, experience or knowledge (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017; Hos and Kekec, 2015). Hos and Kekec (2015) claim that beliefs "are one of the important variables in language education, and teachers' beliefs play an important role in second language teaching and learning; thus, "beliefs about language learning have become one of researchers' interests in the field of second language acquisition" (Incecay & Dollar, p.3395).

Teachers' beliefs are shaped by different factors. Some researchers have claimed that teachers' beliefs arise from their training experiences and personalities (Gabrys-Barker, 2010; Khader, 2012; Wang, 2016). Social psychologists believe that religion, cultural and social factors influence teachers' beliefs (Xu, 2012; Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017). In addition, research has indicated that teachers' conscious or unconscious beliefs about teaching and learning language may make them less open to new approaches and ideas as

well as more likely to reject changes and professional development and affect their practice (Gabrys-Barker, 2010; Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017; Xu, 2012; Wang, 2016).

Besides, teachers' pedagogical beliefs affect the curriculum decisions that determine what should be taught and what path instruction should follow (Altan, 2006; Xu, 2012; Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017). Some teachers are concerned with finishing the condensed curriculum (the syllabus) at the expense of the outcomes; they want to ensure that the syllabus is completed on time regardless of students' comprehension. On the other hand, there might be other teachers who believe that some activities are inadequate, but they teach it to meet the exam requirements (Al-Issa, 2002; Al-Jardani, 2012). The gap between teachers espoused theory and theories-in-use also affect their decision how and when to adapt the curriculum (Argyris, Putnam, & Smith, 1995).

Teachers' beliefs are shaped by different factors. Some researchers have claimed that teachers' beliefs arise from their training experiences and personalities (Gabrys-Barker, 2010; Khader, 2012; Wang, 2016). Social psychologists believe that religion, cultural and social factors influence teachers' beliefs (Xu, 2012; Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017). In addition, research has indicated that teachers' conscious or unconscious beliefs about teaching and learning language may make them less open to new approaches and ideas as well as more likely to reject changes and professional development and affect their practice (Gabrys-Barker, 2010; Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017; Xu, 2012; Wang, 2016). Besides, teachers' pedagogical beliefs affect the curriculum decisions that determine what should be taught and what path instruction should follow (Altan, 2006; Xu, 2012; Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017).

In the Omani context, teachers may face a dilemma between what to teach and what is supposed to be taught. Some teachers, and especially novice and part-time teachers, often strictly adhere to the teachers' guide in the teacher's book (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012) to please supervisors and to escape criticism even if the teaching approaches prescribed in the teacher's book do not align with their own beliefs. Another reason for the gap that exists between teachers' espoused theories and theories in-use might be having a rigid course book (the syllabus) which mandates that teachers finish it within a set time. A

third reason might be the assessment system that impacts teachers' approaches and promotes the adoption of a "teaching to the test" kind of practice (Ministry of Education & World Bank, 2012, p. 31).

Some teachers are particularly concerned with finishing the condensed curriculum (the syllabus) at the expense of the outcomes; they want to ensure that the syllabus is completed on time regardless of students' progress. On the other hand, there might be other teachers who believe that some activities are inadequate, but they implement them to meet the exam requirements (Al-Issa, 2002; Al-Jardani, 2012). The gap between teachers' espoused theories and theories-in-use may also affect their decisions about how and when to adapt the curriculum to the specificities of their classrooms (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017).

For various reasons, teachers' beliefs may not always be reflected in their classroom practices. The teaching approach that the teacher utilises may not align with what he/she believes (Kaymakamoğlu, 2018; Khader, 2012; Mohammad, 2015). This mismatch may occur as a result of factors that were not addressed in professional development initiatives or may result from limited administrative support (Khader, 2012). Researchers have indicated that teachers' beliefs play an important role in their planning, decisions and interests in professional development. However, teachers may encounter some challenges which prevent them from teaching according to their beliefs. In turn, these challenges influence students' progress and preparedness for higher education. With this notion in mind, teachers, at the pre-service stage, should be trained to adapt and implement appropriate teaching methods that suit their students' needs and prepare them for higher education. Teachers need to adapt the curriculum and teaching approaches to help students improve their language skills through exposure to language use during interactions with both the teacher and their peers.

Student-centred approaches and cooperative learning can provide "good transition from restricted to elaborated code" (Israel & Dorcas, 2013, p. 286). Differentiated instruction (Shyman, 2012; Weselby, 2018) is another teaching approach to transit students from restricted to elaborated language. Differentiated instruction means teaching the same

curriculum to all students using different teaching strategies to meet the diverse learning needs of students (Shyman, 2012). Differentiated instruction may help students to overcome the limited language competences that they have as a result of their social background (Israel & Dorcas, 2011; Pausigere, 2016).

However, this might require teachers to have sufficient pre and in-service training to be able to identify and provide for their students' needs which, in turn, requires that teachers know their students' learning preferences and background (Byrne & Flood, 2005; Moloney&Saltmarsh, 2016). I decided to uncover teachers' beliefs about the reasons for the phenomenon under investigation through the teachers' and students' testimonials at interview (qualitative data) and through a fine-grained analysis of the student survey, specifically the scales resulting from factor extraction.

2.2.3. The learners' background

It has been established that a learner's background plays a significant role in his or her lifelong learning experience. According to cognitive theory, learning is a mental process, and the learner uses his or her background, or prior knowledge, to interact with the surrounding environment and learning becomes more effective when he or she engages with peers (Collins, 2008; Ertmer & Newby, 1993; Merriam et al., 2007). Social background, in particular, has been discussed as playing a key role in the ability of students to learn. Bernstein's code theory (Cause, 2010; Bernstein, 2003a; Bernstein, 2003b; Wei, 2014) clearly emphasises the role of the social class to which students belong in influencing their performance and achievement because working class students have restricted language(Alvarado, Chaves& Montero, 2014; Cause, 2010; Wei, 2014).

In the Omani context, social classes may be a less obvious factor, as the Ministry of Education provides free public education (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2010) to all the students from grades 1 to 12. Although this policy is aimed at, and contributes to, minimising exclusion, the difference in social class still continues to influence students' academic success, since the wealthiest and most highly educated families usually send their children to private kindergarten schools to prepare

them for first grade. Some families even prefer keeping their children in private schools for several years (until grades 5, 7, 9 or 12) to provide them with a better preparation for higher education. English, in private schools, is the medium of instruction in science and maths.

Social background, according to Bernstein's code theory, has influence and may shape students' prior learning. In the vein of learners' background, Byrne and Flood (2005) conducted a study with Irish first-year students to explore a range of factors that influence students' learning. They surveyed a total of 129 accountancy students with a purpose-designed questionnaire that included both open-ended and closed questions to explore students' experiences of their first year at university. Among the factors that influenced the students in their preparedness for higher education were school preparation and prior learning experience, as well as poor motivation.

Byrne and Flood's (2005) observation that the practices of teachers "may cultivate a particular set of study skills and a learning orientation that may not be entirely appropriate for the more independent forms of learning expected in higher education" (p. 117) is of particular interest. These findings point to a conflict between the learning skills developed at school level and the learning skills that students are expected to apply in higher education. The reason behind this conflict of expectations of university teachers and the school practices could be a lack of communication between schools and higher education teachers. This social and professional dialogue is essential for enhancing and improving the teaching and learning process and to facilitate the transition to higher education (Rodriquez et al., 2017; Strachan, 2002).

In a similar vein to Byrne and Flood's (2005) research, Ul Amin and Graham (2015) conducted a study in Pakistani universities that attempted to understand how students' prior schooling and English language experience affected their academic discourse in the classroom at the higher education level. Several forms of data were gathered in Ul Amin and Graham's study through student surveys, classroom observations and participant interviews. The results showed that the students' prior schooling and English language experience had had a significant effect on the students' levels of confidence,

participation, and academic endeavours. Thus, the authors argued that, if students have any difficulties regarding English language skills, these should be remedied at the schooling stage “because nourishing linguistic skills in a graduate classroom could be too late for acquiring the desired level of proficiency in English” (p. 4) that is required for performing successfully at higher education level.

The studies conducted by Byrne and Flood (2005) and Ul Amin and Graham (2015) have raised an important issue regarding how learners learn. Their findings are in line with both cognitive (Merriam et al., 2007) and constructivist theories (Collins, 2008) in that the teaching methods must consider the importance of learners’ previous experience. These theories presume that learning approaches are not innate and do not have static characteristics, but rather, that the learner utilises his or her previous schemata to gain new knowledge, thereby developing skills to learn better and to solve problems.

In addition, cognitive and constructivist theorists have argued that the learner plays an active role in the learning process, whereas the teacher’s role is that of a facilitator who helps students become successful learners, not only in the formal context of the class, but also in real-life situations (Aliakbari et al., 2015; Braungart & Braungart, 2008; Ertmer & Newby, 1993; Merriam et al., 2007; Olusegun, 2015).

These findings suggest that the difficulties students encounter at the higher education level originate from their previous experience at the school level, including learning or acquiring the English language. Thus, as an English senior supervisor, I was interested in gaining a greater understanding of why learning English for twelve years in Omani public schools is inadequate preparation for Omani students to pursue studies at higher education level.

2.2.4 Learning for exam and assessment purposes

Students might graduate with high marks (such as A, or even A+) from secondary schools, but obtaining higher grades in school may not be an indicator of being skilful, knowledgeable or well-prepared for successful higher education. As pointed out by

Hirsch (2010) students seem to focus on how to pass the course; their aim is not to excel in the course as such, so they put in minimum effort and getting through the course is their aim rather than learning the content and skills that will facilitate their employment and enhance their lives.

A lack of alignment between schools' content, standards, and examinations and the expectations of colleges and universities may also result in the necessity for university foundation courses. In this regard, Weiner (cited in Dzubak, 2015, p. 1) noted that many bright and confident students who complete high school and start a higher education programme find themselves to be academically underprepared for coursework in the first semester. Dzubak has added that an 'A' (excellent) student in high school does not necessarily indicate a skilful and knowledgeable college candidate. Ansari (2012) has acknowledged that students in Saudi Arabia spend "their 'valuable' years in schools without learning any English" (p. 520).

Students, according to Ansari (2012), tend to be particularly concerned with getting the marks needed to pass the exams regardless of the approach to learning, that is, by means of memorisation or otherwise. As Hirsch (2010) points out, passing exams is "not enough to maintain sufficient academic progress toward a degree" (p. 2). Al-Seyabi and Tuzlukova (2014) state that most Omani students graduate from Post-Basic Education schools with between C+ and A grades; nevertheless, they join higher education institutions with poor writing skills. The findings of Ansari's (2013) and Al-Seyabi and Tuzlukova's (2014) studies indicate that there is a gap between the assessment criteria in higher education and secondary schools. Students at the secondary level might memorise some grammatical rules and vocabulary to pass the exams and obtain high marks.

However, achieving high marks does not necessarily mean that students are knowledgeable and have acquired the required language skills to enable them to succeed in higher education. It is at this stage that English becomes a problem for many of the students. Thus, it is worth highlighting the teaching approaches that teachers use to teach English in secondary schools in Oman.

2.2.5 The teaching and learning environment

Some studies have considered the differences between the teaching and learning environments in schools and in higher education to be among the factors contributing to students' unpreparedness for higher education (Al-Mahrooqi, 2012; Al-Seyabi&Tuzlukova, 2014). Classes at university (lectures) are distinct from the classes that students experience in schools. Dzubak (2015) has stated that one of the primary causes of students' unpreparedness is "the gap between the skills and requirements needed for graduation from high school and the skills needed for college admission and academic success" (p. 3). Hirsch (2010) suggests that while students are in the final year at school, there is a need to train them for the transition to college. For this, the second half of the school senior year should focus not just on getting *into* college but on getting *through* college. This can be accomplished by providing opportunities for dual enrollment to enable students to experience and practice college-level expectations of their performance and assignments. It would be worthwhile to let the students be introduced and prepared for college while they are still in school.

Early placement testing can help students get information about their strengths and weaknesses and give them time to remedy areas in which they are falling short. This practice would better prepare them to enter college with a clear understanding of the required standards of work and effort on their part, once they complete Post-secondary level work (Hirsch, 2010). The different challenges students face when transitioning from PBE to higher education are complicated by the fact that English has become the language of instruction in higher education.

2.2.6 The introduction of English as the medium of instruction in higher education

English is an international language, and, as the current worldwide lingua franca, it is seen in many countries as the language of technology, science, business, finance and banking, and tourism (Al-Bulushi& Al-Issa 2017; Al-Issa et al., 2017; Al-Mahrooqi, 2012; Al-Nasser, 2015; Baporikar& Shah, 2012; Marsh, 2006). Thus, in the Sultanate of

Oman, as in many other countries, the medium of instruction has shifted from Arabic (the mother tongue) to English, at almost all colleges and universities (Al-Bakri, 2013; Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012). This shift is “in response to the global spread of English” (Al-Bakri, 2013, p. 55) because English is almost an essential requirement for professional jobs. However, the decision to change the language of instruction from Arabic to English in higher education is controversial. It might be useful for some students, but for others it is detrimental.

In this regard, Al-Bakri (2013) has claimed that “adopting English for instruction at a tertiary level does not necessarily lead to success” (p. 65), and Ismail (2011) found that “the majority of students were clearly in favour of bilingual education and there was little support for English medium education” (p. 263). It is not unusual for students to encounter difficulties when English becomes the medium of instruction at the higher education level, because students at public schools usually study all the subjects in their mother language, which is Arabic.

In the same vein, Arkin (2013) conducted an exploratory case study investigating the impact of English as a medium of instruction on disciplinary learning in the Turkish university context. The results of the survey administered to undergraduate university students show that, while English was perceived as essential for a professional and academic career by the students, it had a negative effect on understanding the lectures because of the students’ limited language skills.

Similarly, at the University of the Punjab, Shaheen and Tariq (n.d.) investigated the effects of change in the medium of instruction on students’ academic achievement. A total of 50 students were recruited from 17 different Punjab university departments. An open-ended questionnaire was used to gather students’ responses to the change in the medium of instruction. They found that, among other factors affecting students’ academic achievement, the change in the medium of teaching had a significant influence on their achievement.

Hossain et al. (2010) conducted a survey that addressed some of the challenges that 191 Bangladeshi undergraduate medical students encountered regarding their use of English

when learning Anatomy. The results indicated that the students faced different – but noticeable – degrees of difficulty, with the use of English in Anatomy classes being reported as a potential barrier to academic success.

In the Oman context, Sivaraman et al. (2014) investigated the learning difficulties faced by Omani diploma students at Sultan Qaboos University Engineering College. Data were collected through a questionnaire. The findings of the study corroborated the research results cited above, namely, that students' lack of English language proficiency negatively affected their study experience, impeded their understanding of the materials covered in the modules, and had an impact on class participation and overall academic performance. A bridging course in the form of a foundation programme was offered to prepare the students for the Engineering courses. However, even after completing such training, it was observed that the students were not comfortable in classes where English was the medium of instruction.

Sivaraman et al. (2014) have claimed that the lack of interest or motivation can also be ascribed to the need to communicate in a society in a language other than their own (Arabic). "In the case of the Arab world, Arab learners have little opportunities to use the foreign language in their society" (p. 31). Concurring with Sivaraman et al.'s (2014) conclusion, Al-Bakri's (2013) research produced a similar result when she conducted a study exploring Omani college students' opinions regarding using English as a medium of instruction and its impact on students' learning experience. The participants acknowledged that occasionally, their linguistic abilities prohibited them from fully participating in class activities. The data analysis also revealed that using English as the medium of instruction had psychological effects on students, which in turn had an impact on their learning experience. She added that "adopting English for instruction at a tertiary level does not necessarily lead to success" (p. 65).

Al-Seyabi and Tuzlukova (2014) investigated the gap between English language teaching and learning that exists between Post-Basic Education schools and universities in the Sultanate of Oman and focused mainly on writing skills. Their study involved both school students and university students. They concluded that both groups had difficulties

writing in English. However, they also found that university students used a broad range of writing strategies, such as brainstorming, whereas school students focused mainly on revising English grammar and its structures. They recommended that both the schools and the university should put more effort into aligning the students' writing requirements with other skills, such as reading, as a lack of ideas and how to develop them appears to be a serious concern for both parties.

Similarly, Al-Najar (2016a) concluded that, despite several changes implemented by the Ministry of Education (MOE) to improve the education system in the Sultanate of Oman, weaknesses continue to exist. Al-Najar(2016b), throughout her studies, observed that the Post-Basic Education Curriculum (PBEC) does not prepare students effectively for higher education. Al-Najar (2016b) has also proposed that the PBEC should be more flexible so that teachers can use it to deliver the required skills to the pupils.

Sergon (2011) also investigated why Omani students struggle with English from both teachers' and students' perspectives. His study sample was based on two students from Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), one Cycle 1 teacher, two Cycle 2 teachers, and one ministry official. He concluded that the MOE blamed the students for not being motivated, the students blamed the teachers and the curriculum, and the teachers blamed the school curricula. Sergon also reported that the curriculum needed to be changed to be more relevant and realistic. He also suggested providing better qualified teachers who are up to date with new theories of learning and who will work harder to motivate students while employing creative methods to involve and engage students.

Likewise, Al-Mahrooqi (2012), in her an exploratory study, concluded that, out of the seven factors that cause low proficiency in English amongst school students, the teachers (85%) were identified as the top cause; followed by the curriculum (80%); and the students themselves (70%). Drawing on the above studies, Al-Najar (2016a), Al-Seyabi and Tuzlukova (2014), Al-Mahrooqi (2012) and Sergon (2011) have indicated that students encounter difficulties in English because of different teaching methods, because of the curriculum, or because students are unmotivated.

Another important issue raised in Al-Seyabi and Tuzlukova's (2014) study is the gap between English language teaching and learning that exists between Post-Basic Education schools and universities. Their investigation was conducted only on writing. However, researchers believe that the gap between schools and higher education institutions is one of the key factors that make students encounter difficulties. Hirsch (2010) rejected the idea of blaming teachers for students' unpreparedness and claimed that unless the gap between the high school and college preparation is closed, the students will not achieve the goal of raising college achievement levels. To ensure students' successful transition from school to higher education, the gap between school and higher education should be bridged through meaningful dialogue between university teachers and school teachers.

2.2.7 Dialogue between higher education institutions and schools

Creating social dialogue or "meaningful communication between colleges and schools" (Maunganidze, 2015, p. 21; Vere, 2007) is important to achieve educational aims. Lack of communication between educational organisations can cause each institution to establish different standards that do not mesh with other organisations. A difference in standards may thus be one of the factors that affects students' preparedness for university. The absence of such a connection results in some teachers being unaware of the types of subjects taught in colleges, the requirements for successful completion of higher education, and the challenges students might encounter at higher education institutions (Strong American Schools, 2008).

One conclusion that emerges from the range of international and national studies is that students in higher education encounter difficulties when the language of instruction changes from the students' mother tongue to English. This is because students graduate from schools with limited language skills (Hirsch, 2010; Arkin, 2013), and this has an impact on their academic performance. This suggests that students did not develop sufficient language skills when they were in secondary schools, either because their teachers were not well qualified (Al-Mahrooqi, 2012; Sergon, 2011), or because of the ineffectiveness of the Post-Basic Education Curriculum (Al-Najar, 2016b). Therefore,

teachers need to understand how students learn or acquire a foreign or second language. Consequently, it is worth emphasising the particular learning theories that inform second language learning and acquisition; those that teachers need to be familiar with to make informed pedagogical and methodological decisions regarding the different groups of students whom they meet in their classrooms.

2.3 Foreign language teaching and learning – theoretical foundations

Learning a second or a foreign language has become increasingly important in a globalised world. English has become a vital asset for employability as well as for pursuing higher education studies in an educational system such as the system in Oman (Al-Issa, 2014; Al-Mahrooqi, 2012). Hence, it is important to highlight the issue of how a second or foreign language such as English can be best acquired and learned.

According to social cognitivist and constructivist theories, teaching and learning are context-bound (Collins, 2008; Ertmer & Newby, 1993; Merriam et al., 2007). Given that no single theory or approach suits all contexts, language teachers must develop an understanding of the different theories of learning and how such theories shape the learning of a foreign language. Doing so is critical for making informed decisions about methods and techniques that best suit students' contexts of practice. Behaviourism, for instance, promotes the idea that learners acquire new knowledge or gain experience by repeating an action or behaviour until it becomes automatic. Following this theory, learners also learn more effectively when that action or behaviour is rewarded (Allen, Kilvington & Horn, 2002; Ertmer & Newby, 1993; Merriam et al., 2007). Cognitive theory, in contrast, views learning as a mental process; that is, the learner uses his or her background or prior knowledge to interact with the surrounding environment, learning more effectively by engaging with peers (Collins, 2008; Ertmer & Newby, 1993; Merriam et al., 2007). Individualised learning theories, meanwhile, consider individual differences among students, and the need to adjust instruction to the learners' individual characteristics to enable all students to achieve their goals at their own pace (Al-Maskri, Al-Mukhini & Amzat, 2012; Devery, 2015; Green, 2013).

The distinction between language acquisition and language learning is crucial to the discussion of the theoretical principles that inform foreign language teaching and learning. Krashen (1982) has distinguished between the acquisition and learning of a language. He described language acquisition as a subconscious process that leads to fluency, whereas language learning is a conscious process that is demonstrated by learning rules and structures. Swain (cited in Ariza & Hancock, 2003, p. 1) has emphasized a comprehensible output hypothesis that serves four main purposes in second language learning: “1) enhances fluency; 2) creates awareness of language knowledge gaps; 3) provides opportunities to experiment with language forms and structures, and 4) obtains feedback from others about language use”.

Vygotsky (1962, cited in Ariza & Hancock, 2003, p. 2) stressed that second-language learners gain proficiency through interacting with teachers and peers (socio-cultural theory). Vygotsky’s early views of language learning are the roots of the so-called communicative approach to foreign language teaching and learning, which started to develop in the early 1970s (Hanak-Hammerl & Newby, 2002; Zhou & Niu, 2015) and which has since seen a rapid expansion in the language learning literature.

Linguists have attributed the rapid expansion of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach to several factors. First, the CLT approach was rapidly endorsed and advocated by textbook writers. Second, the goal of language instruction in this method is communicative competence. Another reason for CLT’s rapid expansion is that the approach emphasises the teaching of the four language skills (writing, reading, speaking, and listening) and stresses both the functional as well as the structural aspects of language (Hanak-Hammerl & Newby 2002; Zhou & Niu, 2015).

Communication is a vital learning skill, as the teacher and the students share what they know, think, and what they want to express (Al-Mahrooqi, 2012; Mart, 2013). Students might master the rules of sentence formation in a language and still not be very successful in using the language for meaningful communication; a language is a tool for communication more so than the mere knowledge of grammar and isolated vocabulary (Al-Mahrooqi, 2012; Mart 2013; Richards, 2006; Zhou & Niu, 2015). Teachers can

encourage students to communicate through classroom discussion, small group work, presentation or debates, as “communication in English tops the list of required employability skills in fields across any modern economy” (Al-Mahrooqi, 2012, p. 125).

To summarise, learning a language is not only the rote memorisation of vocabulary and the study of the explicit structure of grammar rules. Grammatical competence is a necessary dimension of language learning. However, it is, of course, not all that is involved in learning a language. Students might master the rules of sentence formation in a language and still not be very successful in using the language for meaningful communication (Richards, 2006; Zhou & Niu, 2015).

Therefore, the Ministry of Education in Oman has embarked on curriculum reform to help students to communicate beyond national borders (Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 12). According to the Omani Ministry of Education, the *English for Me* course book, which is taught in public schools, was designed around communicative and skills-based methodology. It is supposed to aim at encouraging learners to participate and interact collaboratively in a more learner-centred way (Al-Bulushi et al., 2017). In addition, the *English for Me* course book is intended to prepare students for lifelong learning, and to enable them to cope with the influence of globalization, which forces countries to move towards internationalization, as “governments are now making fundamental changes in curricula to provide students with the strong fundamental knowledge to prepare them for the requirements of higher education and after that the job market” (Ahmed & Vig, 2010, p. 20).

I, therefore, take it as my responsibility to investigate why students graduate from Post-Basic Education with low English proficiency even though they learn English from grade 1 to grade 12. Because teachers play an important role in students’ life-long learning, the quality of teaching that students receive depends on teachers’ content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and their knowledge of the students, the curriculum, and the context of their practice (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Freeman, 2002; Richards, 2013; Shulman, 1987). Critical to the acquisition and development of the knowledge base for teaching is the quality of training that teachers receive in Oman.

2.4 Teacher training and professional development

Continued and rapid changes in the educational system mean that teachers who have only completed the pre-service training programme might not be adequately equipped to remain effective while coping with change. In-service training is required to update teachers with various teaching skills, pedagogical theory and professional skills (Ifunanya, Ngozi& Roseline, 2013; Lal, 2016), given that the responsibility for preparing young people to maintain national security and development rests mainly with teachers. Teachers in the school environment do not only assist students in acquiring the skills that are the easiest to teach and the easiest to test. They also teach other more valuable skills, such as higher-order thinking skills (e.g., critical thinking and problem-solving); ways of working collaboratively, tools for working, skills for lifelong learning, and career development to cope with social and global challenges.

Thus, a teacher's role should not be limited only to the implementation and delivery stage of the curriculum; his or her role should extend to working as an active manager, agent, planner, designer, coordinator, decision-maker, evaluator and researcher (Datnow, 2012; Patankar& Jadhav, 2013). A curriculum is a structured document covering the skills and topics that comprise the input, and the desired learning objectives are the outputs that need to be accomplished through teaching methods and classroom activities (Kathhiri, 2016). In a situation where teachers have no access to other resources and have limited freedom to prepare their own materials, a formal curriculum is a necessity. The curriculum becomes a guideline for running big classes, using standard textbooks, and when the examinations are designed centrally and individual teachers are only required to teach (Richard 2013). Many teachers teach from the "formal curriculum", the textbook because it is prescribed by authority, often making teachers feel compelled to implement it rigidly. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2004)

As a result, teachers are bound to teaching from the textbook and to the average group of students. In many countries teachers do this because the system has

content-loaded examinations that students must pass and teacher success is measured by students' performance on these examinations. (p13)

Patankar and Jadhav (2013) claim, however, that a curriculum can be a guideline that helps a teacher to occupy his or her role thoroughly. While considering this, it must be noted that a teacher can never be fully dependent on only the formal curriculum as the sole source with which to respond to student diversity and varying needs. The teacher thus continues to implement either informal curricula or the real curriculum in the classroom depending on what best fits the needs of the students and addresses the needs of the community.

A strong conclusion can be made here that teacher training has to consider how well-equipped teachers are with curriculum designing tools, and thus, training teachers to work as an active curriculum designer and implementer “must begin in the pre-service preparation courses through professional in-service development activities” (Al Kathiri, 2016, p. 91). The Ministry of Education in Oman has allocated a huge budget for education and training (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012; Ministry of Education, 2013) concerning professional development and the updating of teachers with various pedagogical skills. The government of the Sultanate of Oman has also established a central Human Resources Development Department which is responsible for planning, implementing and following-up in-service training (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2010).

The Ministry of Education organizes in-service training programmes at three levels: (a) at central level, programmes are conducted at the main training centre of the Directorate General of Human Resources Development; (b) at the governorate level, through enrichment and remedial programmes conducted by trainers and supervisors from each subject, including English; and (c) at the school level, to train its own teachers and staff. There are 15 training centres in the governorates to provide training services for the ministry staff and for teachers (Ministry of Education, 2004, 2017).

Regarding in-service training, the MOE offers different types of programmes for teachers, especially those who are less experienced newcomers to the system (expatriate

teachers, for example), and fresh graduates. These teachers attend different methodology courses or workshops which aim to enable them to teach effectively at different levels. Besides, some teachers are offered a programme to develop their English language proficiency. Further, some other teachers attend a programme called ‘research for professional development’ that aims to provide teachers with action research skills. Moreover, there is a programme for preparing senior teachers to ensure that they have the appropriate coaching and mentoring skills to support teachers in the schools (Al-Bulushi& Al-Issa, 2017; Al-Jardani, 2012).

However, the findings of two separate research studies (Al-Shabibi&Silvennoinen, 2017; Issan& Gomaa, 2010) indicated that these in-service training initiatives have proved to be ineffective because the courses are too theoretical in nature and have failed to address teachers’ real needs (Al-Shabibi&Silvennoinen, 2017; Ministry of Education & World Bank, 2012). This finding may be one of the reasons why teachers in Al-Mahrooqi’s (2012) study were one of the highest ranking factors (85%) in causing students’ low proficiency in English.

Furthermore, Al-Toubi (1998) criticised the teacher education programme at Sultan Qaboos University for having more emphasis on theory, to the detriment of teaching practice. The author added that the actual time allocated to teaching practice in schools (which is one day in every week in the seventh semester and two days a week in their eighth semester) is insufficient and takes place only in the final year (Ministry of Education & World Bank, 2012). Moreover, Al-Khateeb and Ashoor (1997, cited in Al-Issa, 2008) have acknowledged that,

teacher training programs in the Arab World, which Oman is a part of, fail to provide adequate time for the practicum, while paying more attention to the theoretical aspect. In other words, they fail to strike a balance between exposure to theory and teaching practice, since they lack a proper conceptual framework and clear aims that guide their practices and activities. (p. 62)

2.5 Conclusion

Post-Basic Education students encounter challenges that affect their academic performance because teachers' professional skills, competence, and teaching practice have a strong influence on student achievement (Hattie, 2013). Therefore, the present study aims to involve teachers as well exploring their beliefs in terms of why Post-Basic Education students graduate with low levels of language competency, requiring them to study a foundation programme for one to three semesters. According to Souriyavongsa, Sam, Mohamad, and Leong's (2013) study, students lacked an adequate foundation of English language knowledge and had to complete the foundation programme to improve their language proficiency because their English teachers were not well trained.

The findings of the previous studies indicate that many students encounter different challenges when transiting from Post-Basic Education level to higher education level because English becomes the medium of instruction. The findings also highlighted the role of the students' background and its effect on students' learning and achievement at the higher education level. Besides, the results of the previous findings indicated how giving the exam and assessment priority in Post Basic Education schools can affect students' level in higher education and that an "A" grade student in a school does not mean a well prepared and qualified student for higher education. Also, the findings emphasised the impact of factors such as the school environment and the teaching approaches used by teachers in the school. Students at the school level learn what will be on the test. Another important factor that the findings underscored is poor communication, or lack of communication, between schools and higher education institutions. That has a negative effect on students' participation, understanding and achievement at university.

To the best of my knowledge, all previous studies in the existing literature, except that of Sergon (2011), have built mainly on students' perspectives. This, however, represents only one side of the picture. My study attempts to fill in this gap by also attending to the voices of teachers. They are actors who are directly implicated in the phenomenon under investigation, and their perspectives may differ from those of the students.

Another limitation of previous empirical studies is the fact that the difficulties encountered by students when transitioning to higher education have been investigated mainly from only either a quantitative or a qualitative perspective. In the present study, I adopted a mixed methods approach with an exploratory QUAL-quan sequential design (Creswell, 2006) aimed at obtaining a more complete picture, and gaining deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

In addition, the involvement of Post-Basic Education and Language Centre teachers in this study highlights the importance of a social dialogue between schools and higher education institutions to critically examine the three ‘common message systems’ (curriculum, assessment and pedagogy) (Cause, 2010), and determine the extent to which they are aligned with the demands of higher education.

I hope that the present study enriches the literature by exploring the phenomenon under analysis from both the teachers’ and students’ perspectives. In addition, the adoption of a mixed method exploratory QUAL-quan sequential design (Creswell, 2006 a) was intended to promote a “better understanding” (Azorín and Cameron, 2010; Terrell, 2011) of why learning English for twelve years in Omani public schools is inadequate preparation for Omani students to pursue studies at higher education level.

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Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Students often encounter difficulties in their transition from secondary education to higher education, and this significantly affects those students' performance at higher education (Byrne & Flood, 2005; Hillman, 2005). In Oman in particular, Post-Basic Education students encounter several challenges while transitioning to higher education, namely with the use of English as the medium of instruction (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012; Al-Mamari, 2012; Issan& Gomaa, 2010; Oxford Business Group, 2013; Sergon, 2011). There is evidence that more than 80% of Omani diploma students must spend, at a minimum, one semester to complete an additional Foundation Programme in English (Al-Mamari, 2012).

3.2 The objective and the research question

This study aimed to explore and better understand the reasons why learning English for twelve years in Omani public schools is inadequate preparation for Omani students to pursue studies at higher education level. In order to answer this general question, the following questions were formulated to guide the study and to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon from the perspectives of the different groups who are directly involved:

- What are Omani university students' beliefs about the reasons why they have to complete a foundation programme in English to pursue their higher education studies?

- What are the Post-Basic education teachers' beliefs about the reasons why post-basic education students have to complete a foundation programme in English to pursue their higher education studies?
- What are the university Language Centre teachers' beliefs about the reasons why Post-Basic education students have to complete a foundation programme in English to pursue their higher education studies?

3.3 Study design

The mixed methods research methodology (MMR) is recognized as the third major research approach or paradigm (in addition to the qualitative and quantitative approaches) involving the collection, analysis and combination of both qualitative and quantitative sets of data to better understand a research problem or phenomenon (Creswell, 2009; Gay & Mills, 2016; Johnson et al., 2007; Terrell, 2011). The aim of using MMR, according to Azorín and Cameron (2010), is that “the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination may provide a better understanding of research problems and complex phenomena than either approach alone” (p. 95) and “may be able to give voice to diverse perspectives, to better advocate for participants or to better understand a phenomenon” (Terrell, 2011, p. 266). Thus, as mentioned previously, the present study explored the perspectives of both teachers and students to understand why learning English for twelve years in Omani public schools is inadequate preparation for Omani students to pursue studies at higher education level.

There are a variety of benefits from using MMR in social research (Al-Hamdan & Anthony, 2010; Denscombe, 2008; Terrell, 2011). Some researchers use mixed methods to improve the accuracy of their data, while others use mixed methods to produce a more complete picture by combining information from complementary sources. Also, some researchers use mixed methods as a means of avoiding biases (Denscombe, 2008). For the present study, the decision to use MMR seemed appropriate. The use of different data sources allowed the gaining of a more complete picture of the phenomenon under investigation. Given my current position as a senior supervisor for public schools, the use

of MMR was also a means of minimising the risk of researcher bias during data collection, analysis and interpretation.

There are three basic mixed methods designs: explanatory sequential, exploratory sequential and convergent parallel (Gay & Mills, 2016). In the explanatory sequential design, the researcher formulates a hypothesis, collects quantitative data and conducts data analysis. Then the investigator uses qualitative analysis to elaborate on the quantitative results. The purpose of this design is that qualitative data help to explain the quantitative results. Therefore, investigators usually place greater emphasis on the quantitative approach than on the qualitative approach (Creswell, 2006a; Gay & Mills, 2016). In research drawing on exploratory sequential design, the researcher typically starts with collecting qualitative data that can be enhanced by quantitative results (Terrell, 2011). With the convergent parallel-design, qualitative and quantitative data are given equal attention (Gay & Mills, 2016).

For the purpose of the present research, the mixed methods sequential QUAL-quantitative exploratory design was adopted, following the instrument development model (Creswell 2006a; Terrell, 2011). The rationale for adopting this approach is that the analysis of the qualitative data, which allows for an in-depth understanding of the participants' testimonials, served to inform the design of a questionnaire aimed at surveying a larger sample of students. Given the exploratory nature of the sequential design that was adopted, the survey was intended to (i) complement the qualitative data, because it allowed responses from a greater number of students in different faculties and different study areas, and (ii) use the data triangulation technique (Burns & Grove, 1993; Rahman & Yeasmin, 2012) in order to identify commonalities and differences in the students' and the teachers' perspectives and thus ensure validity. I can corroborate the findings collected from both qualitative and quantitative data (Zohrabi, 2013).

No claims for generalizability are to be made of the findings of the survey. However, the findings of this study can likely be applicable to contexts similar to the one in the present study, especially because students who graduate from other Basic Education schools may face similar challenges when transitioning to other higher education institutions in Oman.

Also, the combination of qualitative and quantitative data allows the use of the triangulation technique as a means of ensuring the validity of the findings (Burns & Grove, 1993; Rahman & Yeasmin, 2012).

3.4 Phase I The qualitative data phase

3.4.1 Participants

Three target groups were chosen to participate in the qualitative phase of the study: first-year students at a university, Post-Basic Education teachers, and Language Centre teachers. Three convenience samples (Gay & Mills, 2016) were selected for each target group in view of the availability of the people invited to participate in the study and their willingness to participate in this study.

3.4.1.1 University students

Groves and Welsh (2010) argued that it is essential to listen to students' voices "to improve students' learning" (p. 87). Chidzonga (2014) has claimed that many studies indicate that students' transition from high school to university is burdened with challenges and that there is a need to understand these challenges from the students' perspectives. Therefore, students were involved in describing their experience of studying English, particularly during the two final years of Post-Basic Education (grades 11 and 12), and how they experienced the foundation programme and whether it prepared them for higher education. The characteristics of the students are presented in Table 2.

The target student population of this study was first-year students who had completed the English Language foundation programme and had gone through the Basic Education System in public schools. Students who had attended a private school were excluded for three reasons:

(i) private schools select and use course books that differ from the ones adopted in public schools;

(ii) the researcher is a senior supervisor for public schools, and therefore not very familiar with the private education system; and

(iii) the recommendations suggested by the findings of the present study will be taken into consideration by the Ministry of Education for the public sector.

Interviews were conducted with a convenience sample (Gay & Mills, 2016) of seven Omani students from different colleges at the university who volunteered to participate in the study. According to the inclusion criteria referred to above, all of these students had completed 12 years of Basic Education in public schools and also the English foundation programme. The initial intention was to interview two students from each of the nine colleges at the university. However, this was not possible given the lack of availability of students, because the timing of the interview coincided with that of the students' final exams.

Table 2: Omani university students' interview sample (N = 7)

Pseudonym	Gender	College
Student 1	Female	College of Law
Student 2	Male	College of Commerce
Student 3	Female	College of Science
Student 4	Male	College of Engineering
Student 5	Male	College of Law
Student 6	Male	College of Engineering
Student 7	Male	College of Engineering

3.4.1.2 Post-Basic Education teachers

Post-Basic Education teachers, Omani and expatriate, with at least five years of experience teaching English in public schools were chosen because of their first-hand experience of working with Omani students and their intimate knowledge of the English language capabilities of the Omani students, as well as of the objectives and goals of the Ministry of Education (MOE) regarding the English language curriculum. This sample included six female and six male teachers ($n = 12$) whose professional experience ranged from 5 to 13 years of classroom teaching (Table 3).

Table 3: Post-Basic Education teachers' interview sample (N = 12)

Pseudonym	Years of experience	Gender
T1	9	Female
T2	6	Male
T3	7	Female
T4	9	Female
T5	13	Male
T6	8	Female
T7	8	Male
T8	5	Male
T9	5	Male
T10	10	Female
T11	8	Male
T12	10	Female

3.4.1.3 Language Centre teachers

The Language Centre teachers (LCTs), each of whom had at least five years of experience teaching, Omani and non-Omani, were chosen because they teach the English foundation programme and, therefore, have rich knowledge of the students' difficulties and needs in terms of English language skills. The LCTs use the results of an English test to identify students' needs and improve the students' English language performance before the students begin studies in their chosen field. Table 4 provides more details about these participants.

Table 4: Language Centre teachers' interview sample (N= 4)

Pseudonym	Years of experience	Gender	Nationality
LCT1	5	Male	Omani
LCT2	11	Female	Non-Omani
LCT3	16	Female	Non-Omani
LCT4	11	Female	Omani

3.4.2 Data collection for the qualitative phase

Semi-structured interviews (Blaxter, Tight, & Hughes, 2006) were conducted to collect data for the QUAL stage. Three different interview protocols were developed for each of the samples (university students, Post-Basic Education and Language Centre teachers) based on the relevant literature and in light of the objectives of the study (see Appendices 1, 2 and 3 for the interview protocols). The interview protocols were divided into two main parts. The first part was greeting, assuring confidentiality and anonymity, in addition to asking participants' permission to audio-tape the interviews. The second part

differed for each group of participants. Students' interviews focused on students' previous experience in grades 11 and 12, their perception of the curriculum in terms of preparing for higher education study, the main difficulties they encountered in grades 11 and 12, and their perceptions concerning the foundation programme. The interview protocol for the Post-Basic Education teachers focused on the main difficulties that students encounter in grades 11 and 12 from the teachers' point of view, the type of support that teachers provide to the students, the teachers' role in developing the educational system in terms of developing the curriculum, the assessment, and the social dialogue between schools and higher education institutions. The Language Centre teachers' (LCTs) interview protocol included students' main difficulties from the LCTs' point of view and their experiences of liaising between schools and higher education institutions.

To ensure validity, the interview protocols were revised by eight experts, who were also English supervisors, to check their relevance and suitability for meeting the aim of the research. Furthermore, a pilot test was conducted with a small number of individuals who shared identical characteristics to the actual study participants in order to check for correct language, ambiguity, adequacy of the questions to meet the research objectives, and the duration of the time to conduct the interview (Neale, Thapa, & Boyce, 2006; Seidman, 2006). Modifications were made to the interview questions based on feedback from the pilot participants to improve the final protocols. The interviews were audio taped with all the participants who were informed that the information would be kept confidential.

The student interviews were conducted in a room at the English Language Centre and lasted approximately 30 minutes. The researcher had a copy of the interview translated into Arabic (for the students) by a colleague with a master's degree in translation. The students were given the freedom to discuss their impressions of English language learning in Arabic when they needed to. The teachers' interviews were conducted with two Post-Basic Education teachers (PBETs) in each of the six districts of Muscat, the capital city of Oman. Four LCTs were interviewed in their offices with their permission and agreement. The PBETs and LCTs were interviewed in English because they had

sufficient English language fluency. All of the interviews were audio recorded using a digital voice recorder with the permission of the participants and then transcribed *verbatim* for the purpose of analysis.

3.4.3 Qualitative data analysis

The thematic analysis method is considered to be simple, less time-consuming, and flexible and the most widely used qualitative approach to analyse interview data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013; Javadi & Zarea, 2016). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a method used for “identifying, analysing, and reporting (patterns) themes within the data” (p. 79). The reason I chose this method was that the thematic analysis method works with a wide range of research questions, including the construction of particular phenomena in particular contexts. It can also be used to analyse different types of data, including the transcripts that I had generated through the interview for teachers and students, and it works with both large and small datasets (Clarke & Braun, 2013).

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), there are six steps in thematic analysis: “1. familiarization with the data, 2. generation of initial codes, 3. search for themes, 4. review of themes, 5. definition and naming of themes and 6. production of the report” (p. 16–23). Thematic analysis can be carried out inductively or deductively (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Thomas, 2003). For the present study, a deductive approach was used. This approach is particularly useful when the interview protocol is developed on the basis of the relevant literature, and the researcher has specific research questions that address the main themes or categories to be explored in the interview (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Thomas, 2003).

The interesting and relevant features of the data drawn from the different interviews were manually coded systematically. Items that were explicitly repeated by different interviewees were highlighted and collated. Then, given the relevant literature and the research objectives, themes and sub-themes were created. The following themes emerged from the analysis:

1. Teachers' role and professionalism
2. Students' previous learning experiences
3. Syllabus
4. Assessment
5. Social dialogue

Each theme was considered individually, as well as in relation to the other themes. Together, these themes capture the reasons why learning English for twelve years in Omani public schools is inadequate preparation for Omani students to pursue studies at higher education level.

3.5 Phase II - Quantitative data phase

3.5.1 Participants

The QUAN stage targeted a diverse group of students (male and female) from different colleges at a university. The inclusion criteria for this study were that the participants should have completed the Basic Education System from grades 1 to 12, and finished the foundation programme.

The sample was selected based on the convenience sampling method that meets practical criteria, such availability at a given time, or the willingness to participate are included for the purpose of the study (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016.)

The total number of questionnaires returned was 171. However, three responses were excluded as they did not meet the above inclusion criteria; that is, the respondents had graduated from General Education and not from the Basic Education System and had not gone through the foundation programme. Thus, the total number of valid responses was 168 (64 male and 104 female), as Table 5 below indicates.

Table 5: Distribution of the survey participants by gender (N=168)

Participants	No.
Male	64
Female	104
Total	168

There are nine governorates in the Sultanate of Oman: Al Dakhiliya, Al Dhahira, Al Batinah, Al Buriami, Al Sharqiya, Dhofar, Muscat (the capital of Oman), Musandum and Al Wusta. Students from only eight governorates participated as there were no responses from students from the Al Wusta Governorate (Table 6).

Table 6: Distribution of the Omani students by Governorates (N= 168)

Governorate	No. of students
Al Dakhiliya	27
Al Dhahira	24
Al Batinah	47
Al Buriami	6
Al Sharqiya	25
Dhofar	2
Muscat	35
Musandum	2
Total	168

As can be seen in Table 7 below, students from nine colleges participated in the survey. The mismatch between the total number of respondents ($n= 168$) in Table 6 and the total number ($n= 153$) in Table 7 results from the fact that 15 students did not indicate which college they attended.

Table 7: Distribution of the Omaniuniversity studentsby college (N = 153)

College	No of students
Science	20
Engineering	49
Art and Social Science	8
Commerce and Economic	19
Medicine	2
Education	11
Nursing	11
Agriculture and Marine Science	26
Law	7
Total	153

3.5.2 Data collection for quantitative phase and questionnaire validation

A questionnaire was developed building on information suggested by the relevant literature and the findings from the qualitative data (Appendix 4). The questionnaire included three sections. The first section consisted of general questions aimed at collecting sociodemographic data about the students. The second section consisted of a list of items aimed at garnering the students' experience as learners of English at Post-Basic Education level regarding the four main domains:

1. teachers' role,
2. curriculum,
3. assessment,
- and 4. social dialogue.

I formulated the statements for each domain based on the findings of my previous analysis of the qualitative data and the lessons learned from the literature, namely previous empirical studies by Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi (2012), Al Mahrooqi (2012) and Sergon (2011). Before the final version of the questionnaire was administered to the target students, it was given to a group of colleagues (English supervisors) to check for language and clarity of instructions and questions. Then it was given to a panel of eight experts in qualitative and quantitative research and research measurement instruments (Olson, 2010; Parsian & Dunning, 2009) to check for face and content validity of the instrument (Olson, 2010). The panel of eight experts was also asked to indicate the relevance and appropriateness of each item to the corresponding domain. The panel accepted the items. The colleagues (the English supervisors) checked the language and clarity; they also added two more items to the social dialogue domain as follows: “arranged with school to invite undergraduate students to talk about their experience”, and “invited university teachers to observe his/her lessons.” Besides, the statement, ‘I wish my English teacher in Post-Basic school’, was replaced by ‘my English teacher in Post-Basic school’ to indicate what was done and not done in school, according to the students’ perspectives.

The level of agreement among the panel and the ratio of validity were both calculated using the quantitative approach to content validity proposed by Lawshe (1975, cited in Ayre & Scally, 2014, p. 79) according to the following formula:

$$CVR = (n_e - N/2) / (N/2)$$
where CVR stands for content validity ratio, n_e for number of SME (the subject matter expert raters) panelists indicating "essential" and N indicated total number of SME panelists. The level of agreement among panel members is supposed to be greater than 50%, as suggested by Lawshe (1975). That is, the items should be included if the CVR is greater than 50% and discarded from the final instrument if the CVR is below 50%. The total number of items included in the final version of the questionnaire was 33 (Table 8).

Table 8: Validation of the questionnaire by the expert panel

My English teacher in Post-Basic Education...	No. of experts who said relevant	No. of experts who said relevant to some extent	No. of experts who said not relevant	CVR %
1. asked me to memorise vocabulary	7	1	0	75%
2. taught me grammar rules in the Arabic language	7	0	1	75%
3. taught me grammar rules in English	8			100%
4. talked to me in English in the class	8			100%
5. encouraged me to work more in pairs and in groups to practise English	8			100%
6. encouraged me to make oral presentations	8			100%
7. encouraged me to speak English in the class	8			100%
8. encouraged me to do projects in English (wall paper magazine, meet people, visit some places and write reports ... etc.)	8			100%
9. asked me to read different types of texts (dialogues, letters, reports, stories,	8			100%

instructions, etc.)				
10. used only the course book to teach me English	8			100%
11. gave me more activities to improve my English	7	1		75%
12. asked me to do homework	8			100%
13. understood my difficulties	8			100%
14. told me how important English is for studying at university	8			100%
15. encouraged me to participate in the class even when I made mistakes	8			100%
16. developed a good relationship with me	8			100%
17. cared about me	8			100%
18. used different materials (videos, pictures, newspaper articles, etc.) to teach me English	7		1	75%
19. Gave me different activities in the class (roleplay, simulations, etc.)	7		1	75%
20. introduced more interesting topics in our English lessons	7		1	75%
21. gave me challenging	7		1	75%

activities to do in English				
22. encouraged me to use English outside the class	6		2	50%
23. told me about some good websites to improve and practise English outside the school	6		2	50%
24. trained me for the English exam	7		1	75%
25. explained my mistakes	6	1	1	50%
26. gave me feedback about my work	6	1	1	50%
27. told me how to improve my English	6		2	50%
28. corrected my writing mistakes	5	2	1	25%
29. corrected my speaking mistakes	5	2	1	25%
30. arranged with school administration visits to colleges and universities	8			100%
31. invited people from higher education institutions to clarify our questions and inquiries	8			100%
32. arranged for the school to invite undergraduate students to talk to us about their	8			100%

experience				
33. invited university teachers to observe his/her lessons	8			100%

The third section of the questionnaire consisted of three open-ended items aimed at eliciting students' opinions about their experience as learners of English in Post-Basic education. The students were given a choice to answer these items in either English or Arabic to enhance their expression.

3.5.3. Questionnaire pilot test

After the final draft of the questionnaire had been edited, a pilot study was conducted with a group of 20 students who were not part of the actual study sample. I entered the final version of the questionnaire on the Survey Monkey website platform to be answered online by all of the students throughout the country (Sultanate of Oman) who had finished the foundation programme. The link of the questionnaire was given to the Head of the Language Center who forwarded it to LCTs. The LCTs then forwarded the link to students. Participants were requested not to include their names or to sign the survey.

3.5.4 Quantitative data analysis (Phase II)

Both descriptive statistics and inferential statistics were used to analyse the quantitative data. Descriptive statistics aim to describe and summarise data in a meaningful way. Inferential statistics, in turn, are used to find possible relationships (associations and/or correlations) between variables and make predictions about a population building on data collected from a sample (Creswell, 2009; Gay & Mills, 2016; Al-Hemyari, 2018).

In my study I used descriptive statistics to provide summaries of the data collected (sociodemographic data and the students' perceptions of a number of variables involved in the phenomenon under analysis), and to form the basis of the inferential

analysis that was conducted to validate the data collection tool (the questionnaire), to identify significant dimensions (factor extraction) and check for significant relationships between sociodemographic variables (areas of study, and geographical location/governorates). The descriptive and inferential analysis was performed with the use of the SPSS programme, Version 22.

As mentioned earlier, all previous studies have built only on students' perspectives which represent only one side of the picture. By contrast, this study included the voices of teachers, who are actors directly implicated in the phenomenon under investigation. However, to complete the picture of all parties involved in the teaching learning process students also were included in my study. It is important to listen to students' voices when aiming to improve their learning (Chidzonga, 2014; Groves & Welsh, 2010). In the particular case of this study the inclusion of the students' perspectives was meant to serve two main purposes: (i) to seek convergence through triangulation thus ensuring reliability and validity (Creswell, 2014), and to triangulate them with the teachers' perceptions on the phenomenon under investigation to highlight some reasons that were not discussed in the previous literature (ii) to contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon through looking for possible patterns of response associated to the different sociodemographic characteristics of the students.

3.6 Ethical considerations

According to the British Educational Research Association's *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research* (BERA, 2011), "Researchers must take the steps necessary to ensure that all participants in the research understand the process in which they are to be engaged, including why their participation is necessary, how it will be used and how and to whom it will be reported" (p. 5). Ethical concerns are related to the standards and values that are maintained alongside the research being conducted. It must be shown throughout how the researchers aim to protect the rights, dignity, safety and well-being of all research participants, as well as the researchers themselves (Fouka & Mantzorou, 2011). To ensure that the participants in my thesis study understood the process in which

they were expected to be engaged, I adhered to the British Educational Research Association's *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research* (2011). Also, I engaged in an ongoing reflexive discussion about these ethical concerns with my supervisory team. In the following sections, I will provide details on how these guidelines were applied, and the steps that were taken to ensure that I attended to each of the ethical considerations that were raised.

3.7 Access to the field

3.7.1 Permission from different authorities

Ethical approval letters are an essential part of the process of gaining permission for access to conduct fieldwork. I obtained the ethical approval letter from the Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC) at the University of Liverpool (see Appendix 5). Based on that approval, an official letter from the Ministry of Education (MOE) for the Sultanate of Oman was issued that allowed me to access schools, and to meet and interview Post-Basic Education teachers in the districts (Appendix 6). Also, I sent an email to the Language Centre Research Committee requesting permission to interview both Language Centre teachers and the first-year students who had completed the foundation programme after graduation from the Basic Education System at public schools. The research permission form was sent to me as a formal document granting permission to conduct my research at the university Language Centre (see Appendix 6). The form was completed by the researcher and submitted along with the Participant's Consent form for both Language Centre teachers and students (see Appendices 7 and 8).

3.7.2 Informed consent

Researchers are expected to obtain informed consent from all those who are directly involved in the research. Participants must be provided with an explanation of the aim of the research and the nature of the study (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011; Neale et al., 2006). Participants should be allowed to ask any questions to ensure that they have read

and understood the information about the study and that they voluntarily agree to participate (Seidman, 2006; University Research Degrees Committee, 2008).

3.7.3 Informed consent for the qualitative phase

Given that I am a senior supervisor for public schools in Oman, the initial contact with the teachers was made by the school administration to avoid any pressure or embarrassment that the teachers might feel if they were not willing to participate in the study. The Participant Information Sheet was given to the school administration to distribute the teachers to familiarise them with the aim of the research (Appendix 9). Seven days later, I visited the schools (two Post-Basic schools from each district) to arrange the interview schedule and to meet the teachers who were interested in participating in the study. If they agreed to participate, they signed a Participant Consent Form (Appendix 10).

The initial contact with the Language Centre teachers was made through the Language Centre Research Committee, who sent an email to the Language Centre teachers inviting them to participate in the research. The email was accompanied by the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix 11). The LCTs who volunteered to participate contacted me to arrange interviews.

The students were first contacted through the Language Centre teachers who sent an email inviting students to participate in the study. This email was accompanied by the Participant Information Sheet for students (see Appendix 11). The students who were interested in volunteering to participate in the study got in touch with me to arrange an interview.

Before the interviews, I ensured that all the participants had read and understood the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix 12), which included an indication of the aims of the research, clear explanations of each participant's role, the risks and the benefits involved in taking part in the study, and an assurance of confidentiality. The Participant Consent Form (in Arabic and English) was explained to the students before the interview

and before the students signed it (Appendix 8). All participants (PBETs, LCTs and students) were informed that they could withdraw from the study and end the interview at any time. All of the interviews were audio-recorded with each participant's permission.

3.7.4 Informed consent for the quantitative phase

The survey was administered online through the Survey Monkey application. The link to the survey was sent to the students' coordinators who in turn sent it to the students.

The Participants' Information Sheet for students (Appendix 12) was attached to the survey indicating the purpose of the study. In order to demonstrate agreement to participate, the students were asked to tick (✓) the statement written on the invitation 'I have read the invitation above, and I agree to participate in this study'.

3.8 Confidentiality and anonymity

All of the participants in the study were ensured anonymity and confidentiality in the treatment and dissemination of the information provided for the purposes of the research.

To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, the researcher undertook the following steps:

1. During the interview, the researcher and the interviewee were always alone in the room.
2. All audio recordings, interview transcriptions and survey data were kept on a personal computer, and no individual participant's information was identified within the transcripts.
3. Although interview data cannot be kept anonymous during data collection, the interviewees were assigned codes for the data analysis and in the final thesis report.
4. To ensure anonymity in the students' survey, participants were asked not to write down their names or sign the survey.

5. Survey data gathered demographic information about individual respondents for the purpose of sample characterisation and contextualization. However, survey data were treated anonymously.

3.9 Conclusion

In my study, I used both qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a complete picture of the research problem; that is, to have a better understanding of the phenomenon that I investigated. Having more than one method to obtain the data helped to confirm the results, in that I was able to examine the similarities and differences obtained from the different sets of data.

By using more than one source of data, I reduced the risk of bias and any influence that I might have had on the participants during the interviews. Also, using a combination of both methods allowed me to obtain answers to both the ‘what’ and the ‘why’ questions for research objectives. One first advantage of combining qualitative and quantitative methods was that it allowed me to construct the questionnaire in such a way that it explored the research questions. Second, having both the questionnaire and the interviews allowed me as a researcher to cross-check (Rahman & Yeasmin, 2012) the data. Thirdly, by combining qualitative and quantitative data, I was able to identify commonalities and differences in the testimonials of the different groups of participants, thereby gaining a more complete view and understanding of the phenomenon under analysis. The next chapter presents the findings that emerged from these different sets of data after they were analysed.

Results

4.1 Introduction

The present study is an exploratory (Creswell, 2006a; Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007) study aimed at uncovering the reasons why learning English for twelve years in Omani public schools is inadequate preparation for Omani students to pursue studies at higher education level. The question addressed in this study called not only for a rich description (Burns & Grove, 1993; Rahman & Yeasmin, 2012) of the factors underlying the phenomenon under investigation, as pointed out by the different groups of participants involved but also a fine-grained analysis of the quantitative data. That data and the findings in this chapter have been presented into two phases: the qualitative phase and the quantitative phase.

4.2 The qualitative data (Phase I)

Five main themes and sub-themes emerged from the analysis of the qualitative data (Phase I). These themes and sub-themes are as follows:

1. Teachers' role and professional competency:
 - (i) teachers' experience and teaching approach, and
 - (ii) teachers' rapport and understanding;
2. Students' previous learning;
3. Post-Basic Education syllabus;
4. The assessment system:
 - (i) apparent mismatch between continuous assessment and the end of semester exam; and

(ii) exam-based oriented teaching and learning

5. The social dialogue between higher education and Post-Basic Education schools.

4.2.1 Teachers' role and professional competency

Biggs and Tang (2011) state that each individual teacher is an institution as a whole, and creates a learning environment either through formal or informal interactions with students. Effective teachers, according to Rubio (2009) and Zhan and Le (2004), need to possess more than just content knowledge to ensure that their interactions with students are highly beneficial. They need to be concerned not only with students' achievements but also with their behaviour, attitudes, and emotions. Effective secondary school teaching, in the view of Loader and Dalgety (2008), combines "professionalism with care, understanding, fairness and kindness" (p. 43) and includes providing appropriate, timely, and useful career guidance and advice about different learning programmes that support students so that they make a successful transition to higher education. These factors are deemed to be essential, regardless of the students' aptitudes.

The teacher's role and teachers' competence and its effect on students' achievement, attitudes and behaviour were mentioned in the interviews by all three groups of participants: Language Centre teachers (LCTs), Post-Basic Education teachers (PBETs) and university students, as being critical factors in explaining students' limited linguistic competence in English; a limitation that makes it difficult to pursue studies at a higher education level despite learning English for 12 years in public schools. In this respect, the interviewees felt that the teachers' experience and approach to teaching, and the teachers' rapport and understanding, were the main factors having the most impact on students' preparedness to pursue studies in higher education in English.

(i) Teachers' performance and teaching approach,

During the interviews, the students expressed mixed feelings about their teachers, their previous experiences as learners, and how they had been exposed to English. Most of the students who were interviewed felt that the English teachers that they had in Cycle 1 (grades 1–4) and Cycle 2 (grades 5–10) did not have enough experience, and many stated that their teachers' lack of experience in Cycles 1 and 2 had affected their language proficiency in higher grades, as illustrated in the quote below:

Some teachers I faced in some classes, they don't have enough experience to teach us English. When I went to grade 10, our teacher has full experience to teach us, but when I went to grade 12, teacher have much experience. For that, I don't think they prepared us.

(Student 1, female, College of Law, 2nd year)

Besides, some students claimed that they only learned 'real English' at Post-Basic level (grades 11 and 12), as shown in the following quotes in Table 9.

Table 9: Students' responses about learning 'real English.'

They don't know how to explain or teach. Some of the teachers were excellent and I learned from them, but most of the teachers were so terrible. (Student 2, male, College of Commerce, 3rd year).
The teacher didn't teach us strong English. I studied real English when I was in grade 10. (Student 3, female, College of Science, 2nd year)

From grade 1 to 4 you know basic English, A B C, songs, Maha, Vicky. From grade 5 to 10 like empty class. Teacher come, have fun in class without knowledge or skills in English, it was boring lectures. After grade 10 I focus on speaking because I had competition.

(Student 5, male, College of Law, 2nd year)

(ii) Teachers' rapport and understanding

Apart from the pedagogical dimension that was discussed above, another sub-theme that emerged from the data is associated with the social and/or personal relationship between teachers and students. As stated by Rubio (2009) it is not enough to just know the students in a formal setting (i.e., in the classroom: in terms of learning strategies or learning style), it is also necessary to know about them in an informal setting (i.e., outside the classroom: their likes and dislikes, their background, their motivation, aptitude and attitude to learning). He stressed the importance of learning about students' lives outside the class, stating that these outside influences "have a great effect on behaviour and performance in the classroom and in their learning process" (p. 42).

Likewise, Thomas (2008) asserted that "[i]t would become such a nice feeling if each student could feel that their teacher cares about them and their learning" (p. 171). In the same vein, Laxmi (2016) adds that a positive teacher-student relationship has important and long-lasting implications for both the academic and social development of students. Students who have close, positive and supportive relationships with their teachers "will attain higher levels of achievements than those students with more conflict in their relationships. The student is likely to trust her teacher more, show more engagement in learning, behave better in class and achieve at higher levels academically." (p. 64)

Bearing this in mind, and the fact that many Omani students do not understand the significance of English as a language for their careers and further studies (Al-Issa, 2014; Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012; Al-Mahrooqi, 2012), establishing positive relationships between Omani students and English teachers can increase the students' interest in learning English as an important international language for communication and perhaps reduce the idea that English is simply a subject requiring a pass. Developing a good relationship with students and understanding their needs were factors emphasised by the PBETs and LCTs in the interviews as ways of boosting the self-confidence of learners. Both PBETs and LCTs think that it is not always right to blame the students for being 'weak'. Instead, teachers need to understand students' circumstances and find ways to motivate students to learn English even if they make mistakes, as demonstrated in the following responses:

If they are weak in the class, it's not their fault, the situation, the environment. They are not getting English from everywhere; only in the class ... if they can't speak I model it and ask them to repeat, so I can build 'confidence' in them.

(T2, 6 years of experience, non-Omani)

there should be flexible environment, it is important, you have to thank everyone in class even if they don't participate, encourage them, motivate them, the teacher shouldn't use words like you didn't prepare ... you didn't study.

(T1, female, 9 years of experience, Omani)

we are so quick to blame the students, blame the circumstances; they are coming away from their families, it's like a new situation, it's culture shock for them, we don't want to sit down and evaluate ourselves and say 'what am I doing that's not working'.

(LCT2, female, 11 years of experience, non-Omani)

4.2.2 Students' previous learning experience

Another relevant theme emerging from the data was the impact of students' previous learning experience on their academic progress. In this regard, Laxmi (2016) claimed that everyone's

prior education experience is vitally important and that “[b]y examining prior educational experiences, pre-service teachers can discuss what they should or should not do with a class of students” (p. 1).

In the present study, when the participants, both PBETs and LCTs, were asked why, in their opinion, learning English for twelve years in Omani public schools is inadequate preparation for Omani students to pursue studies at higher education level, they declared that the students’ previous learning experience may not have included enough proper exposure to the language, and some students may have been neglected in terms of teaching and support, especially in the early grades. The following responses emphasise the importance of students’ previous learning in preparing students for higher levels.

But what I feel in our grade 1 and 2, is that some students are neglected. Maybe they’re slow learners, maybe they have problems, so the teachers don’t concentrate on them, they just go with the good students and finish their work.

(T4, female, 9 years of experience, Omani)

Students are not well established from the beginning, from cycle 1 and cycle 2 so we need many efforts to be made there, in cycle 1 and cycle 2, and then, these challenges would vanish.

(T7, male, 8 years of experience, non-Omani)

Regarding the previous learning experiences, Thomas (2008) and Gray and MacBlain (2015) claimed that the activities young elementary school children engage in, the type and the quality of educational games they play at school and the learning environment are crucial for making successful adjustments in adult life. These factors play a significant role in gaining knowledge, obtaining problem-solving skills, and developing better skills to learn individually and with their peers.

The LCTs, PBETs and the students in the present study emphasised the role of students’ prior learning in influencing their preparedness for further studies, and this point of view is echoed in the literature. Alotaibi, Al-Diahani, and Al-Rabah (2014) concluded in their study entitled ‘An

investigation of the factors which contribute to low English achievement in secondary schools, as perceived by Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti English teachers' that the most important factor influencing the success of students coming from intermediate school was a lack of English basics, such as grammar and vocabulary. These authors' findings are in line with the responses provided by some PBETs at the interviews, who stated that many students who come from Cycles 1 and 2 need more support to improve their proficiency.

Nevertheless, teachers may not be able to provide such assistance due to a heavy workload. Normally, teachers in Oman have to teach a minimum of 20 hours per week, apart from being assigned other administrative and technical tasks. However, given a shortage of teachers in some schools, existing teachers are assigned up to 28 teaching hours per week (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012). All PBETs agreed, as indicated in the quotations below, that when students reach grades 11 and 12, they lack many basic skills, which might be attributable to previous learning experiences in Cycles 1 and 2. They believe that if the students had achieved the required outcomes in the previous stages (Cycles 1 and 2), they would have done better in grades 11 and 12. Some PBETs stated that it is too late to teach the students basic skills in grades 11 and 12. It seems that the PBETs presume that time in grades 11 and 12 would be better spent on developing students' advanced skills rather than the basic skills. This might explain why teachers in grades 11 and 12 were more concerned with preparing the students to pass the exams (see Table 10 below).

Table 10: Post-Basic Education teachers' claims about areas of difficulties that students encounter

<p>When they come to us, I think it really tough in two years, which is 11 and 12, to change students ... We give them remedial work, but through my experience, I felt it's useless. The results are very little, little progress.</p> <p>(T4, female, 9 years of experience, Omani)</p>
<p>Most of the students find difficulty in writing, to write a correct sentence, to construct a correct sentence. They have limited vocabulary.</p> <p>(T7, male, 8 years of experience, non-Omani)</p>
<p>They don't know what the verb is, what's the noun, what's the adjective. They don't know how to form a sentence.</p> <p>(T6, female, 8 years of experience, Omani)</p>
<p>They don't know the alphabet. They don't know the structure of a sentence. But, I believe this is not students' problem because from grade 1 we have to take care of the children.</p> <p>(T4, female, 9 years of experience, Omani)</p>

The LCTs expressed similar views to those held by PBETs regarding students' previous learning experiences in the following terms:

I feel of course not all students need it, but foundation course is very important for those students who come from the Basic Education System in the government schools. I think

they're weak; it doesn't qualify them to go to their mainstream. These students came with gaps; they carry these gaps from one grade to another in so many skills carrying these gaps until they reach tertiary education.

(LCT 4, female, 11 years of experience, Omani)

Foundation course prepares them better for the college. Foundation course is not all about language. We teach them how to think critically. At school, they are taught in a passive way.

(LCT1, male 5 years of experience, Omani)

The above responses also reveal that PBETs in grades 11 and 12 do not have sufficient time to implement remedial work strategies to address the students' shortcoming from previous cycles. The best they believe they can do is to prepare remedial lessons or activities that enable students to practise exam-type questions that allow students to pass the semester test exam. However, these extra materials might not assist much at this stage (grade 11 and 12), as students lack basic skills.

The responses from the students in the interviews also confirmed what their teachers had stated. The students' responses in the interviews indicate that they reach grades 11 and 12 with a weak foundation in English, which forces some to hire private teachers who provide them with different activities to improve their language. Others said that their teachers in grade 11 and 12 were supportive (Table 11).

Table 11: Students' responses about their Post-Basic Education school teachers

<p>In the weekend, I search in many websites on the laptop, and I try to write some topics to prepare for exam, final exam.</p> <p>(Student 1, female, College of Law, 2nd year)</p>
<p>Teachers in grade 11 and 12 give more new information and give me more activities. I go to the private teacher, and he tells me more for English. He gave me more books for grammar and for writing.</p>

(Student 4, male, College of Engineering, 2nd year)
Some teachers, they have the feeling that they want to be their students good. Yes, but not all teachers. When I was in grade 11 there was teacher from Egypt. Also in grammar, some teachers ignore it; they ignore grammar. But which I studied with them they actually give us the grammar.
(Student 7, male, College of Engineering, 3rd year)

In sum, the students’ lack of basic language skills and the difficulties of 11 and 12 grade teachers to provide for the students’ needs are reasons shared by all groups of participants, to explain why learning English for twelve years in Omani public schools is inadequate preparation for Omani students to pursue studies at higher education level.

4.2.3 Post-Basic Education Syllabus

Another major theme that emerged from the data was related to the Post- Basic Education syllabus. It is worth mentioning that there was an overlap in the conceptions of ‘curriculum’ and ‘syllabus’ as the participants often used these two terms interchangeably.

Curriculum, as defined in the Glossary of Education Reform (Hidden Curriculum, 2014) refers to:

the lessons and academic content taught in a school or in a specific course or program. In dictionaries, the *curriculum* is often defined as the courses offered by a school, but it is rarely used in such a general sense in schools. Depending on how broadly educators define or employ the term, curriculum typically refers to the knowledge and skills the students are expected to learn, which includes the learning standards or learning objectives they are expected to meet; the units and lessons that teachers teach; the assignments and projects given to students; the books, materials, videos, presentations,

and readings used in a course; and the tests, assessments, and other methods used to evaluate student learning. (p.1)

In contrast, the term ‘syllabus’, in the English dictionary is described as “a plan of the topics, the subjects or books to be studied in a particular course, especially a course that leads to an exam” (see Cambridge University Press, 2017 website). Curriculum is a very general concept which involves consideration of the whole complex of philosophical, social and administrative factors which contribute to the planning of an educational programme. Syllabus, on the other hand, refers to that subpart of a curriculum which is concerned with a specification of what units will be taught (as distinct from how they will be taught, which is a matter for methodology) (Alien, 1984 in C. J. Brumfit).

Careful analysis of the data reveals that the use of the term ‘curriculum’ by some participants refers to the Omani ‘syllabus’, which, in the case of grades 11 and 12, is presented in *Engage with English*. This is a set of materials comprising the student book, the skills book, and the teacher’s book. The course book includes a section with the topics (themes) for each unit and the learning outcomes for each grade.

As noted above, the PBETs, LCTs and the students in the present study emphasised that the syllabus does not satisfy the students’ needs because the students are not sufficiently prepared to successfully achieve the learning objectives set in the Post-Basic Education syllabus. One problem with the syllabus is its inflexible nature. The requirement for all public system schools to use the same in-house course book and to cover the entire syllabus within a limited time to meet the exam requirements represents an obstacle to students’ improvement of their communicative abilities (Al-Issa, 2002; Al-Jardani, 2012). Despite their awareness of the need to adapt the syllabus and use extra materials, some PBETs felt that the imposition of completing the syllabus and preparing the students for the exam prevented them from doing so.

Some PBETs were aware of the need to adapt the syllabus to meet their students’ needs, and claimed that they had the autonomy to use extra materials to improve students’ performance as one size does not fit all. However, the requirement to complete the syllabus and prepare the students for the exam was perceived as the main obstacle to achieving better results in terms of their students’ competencies in English at the desired level. The teachers’ responses below

(Table 12) explain how they have a willingness to support the ‘weak’ students, but because of the demands set out in the of the course book, the teachers’ concerns shift to concentrating on finishing the syllabus and preparing students for the exams.

Table 12: Teachers’ responses regarding their concern with exams

<p>They need to pass the exam; some good students want to escape the foundation course, so they ask for IELTS. So, we are even giving them extra material. We are dealing with that, but it is not managed properly. As I told you before, because of time and supervisors asking us to finish the curriculum. (T5, male, 13 years of experience, non-Omani)</p>
<p>There are some tasks which we feel are not helping students or they are above their level. We have to modify them to suit student’s level, and I bring materials and stuff from outside the book to see how much they can get from that. It is not enough to tell them to write at home. They should know how to write it, organise it, topic sentence. I explain what essay is, how to write the style, but the problem is time. I have to finish the curriculum. But, by reducing one theme, I think things are getting better. (T1, female, 9 years of experience, Omani)</p>
<p>We can adapt the curriculum according to the situation and the students’ capacity, but this should not affect the core units because students sit for the exam.</p> <p>(T2, male, 6 years of experience, non-Omani)</p>

Some LCTs in the present study reinforced the importance of adapting the syllabus and making use of different teaching and learning resources to suit students' needs and achieve desirable outcomes:

At the Language Centre we have some books written by LC faculty, in-house materials and we have commercial textbooks. These books help students to explore other cultures. It helps you to go beyond students' knowledge. Why don't we have both, Engage with English to protect and save our identity and culture and the commercial course book where students can get materials from that.

(LCT 1, male 5 years of experience, Omani)

They (students) need to be given projects. They (teachers) must make English interesting through doing a project. For example, interview someone or to visit a place and do presentations. Students need a hand on activities.

(LCT 3, female 16 years of experience, non-Omani)

The students, who participated in Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi's (2012) study, and those in Al-Najar's (2016b), were satisfied with the syllabus. However, they were dissatisfied with the challenging activities assigned to them. Al-Issa (2014), quoting Nunn, Tyacke, and Walton(1987), emphasised the importance of "given tasks and meaningful activities that provoke cognitive challenge and promote problem solving and critical thinking to arouse the students' motivation and positively impact their attitudes about learning English" (p. 407). The results of the present study suggest that some Post-Basic Education teachers do not implement extra activities as a common practice because they are focused on covering the syllabus within a limited time. Identical findings were reported by Alotaibi, Al Diahani and Al Rabah (2014) in Kuwait, where the teachers seemed to be more concerned with finishing the condensed syllabus at the expense of the outcomes, which was the students' proficiency in English. Those researchers concluded that an extensive English syllabus was considered a demotivating learning factor because "teachers will ensure that the syllabus is finished regardless of students' comprehension" (p. 450).

In the same vein, Sergon (2011) urged the need to reform the curriculum in order to make it more appropriate and practical for the students, which resonates with William's (1998, as cited in Thomas, 2008, p. 44) contention that "the curriculum is worthless if we cannot convince students that they are learning useful life skills". In this regard, Al-Maskri et al. (2012) asserted that the Omani curriculum does not satisfy society's needs, "because of the gap between what is

mentioned in the curriculum and what is going in the real life” (p. 56). They believe that the curriculum has to be practical and interesting to attract students to be “knowledge seekers”.

According to Biggs and Tang (2011), “it is clear to both teachers and students what the intended outcomes of learning are, where all can see where they are supposed to be going. Outcomes-based teaching and learning require this of teachers, whereas teaching in the form of ‘covering a topic’ does not” (p. 23).

4.2.4 The assessment system

The fourth relevant theme that emerged from the interview data was related to assessment. This theme has not been thoroughly discussed in previous studies. As mentioned above, this might be because the researchers in previous studies were instructors at institutions of higher education, and they may not have been aware of the assessment system in Post-Basic Education. In terms of assessment, two main aspects emerged from the participants’ testimony: (i) an apparent mismatch between continuous assessment, which should have an important formative dimension and the end of semester summative assessment by exam; and (ii) the consequent tendency of the teachers to teach for exam purposes.

(i) Apparent mismatch between continuous assessment and the end of semester exam

In the interviews, all PBETs claimed that the exams (semester tests) in grades 11 and 12 do not align with the syllabus regarding writing skills. For instance, grade 11 students in semester one practise two types of writing functions which are assessed through continuous assessment and put in the students’ files (the portfolio). The students in semester one, for instance, practise interactive and informative writing continuously (using CA) throughout the semester. However, in the semester test, they are tested on evaluative and narrative. Therefore, the students have to practise the four types of writing: narrative, informative, evaluative and interactive, throughout the semester, even if that function is not included in the syllabus, and the PBETs have to prepare extra materials to cover the four types of writings and to mark students’ work. As a consequence, PBETs give more attention to the functions that are assessed through CA rather than to the functions that are tested because of limited time.

This, as the interviews with the PBETs reveal, places an extra burden on teachers and may be confusing the students. Below is a comment from a teacher explaining the difference between what the students practise and what they are tested on. This gap between what students learn and what they are tested on is a good example to indicate that there is no communication between the examination and the curriculum departments, which creates a dilemma for teachers in relation to what aspect of teaching to prioritize: developing students' communicative competence in English, or completing the syllabus, or finishing the syllabus.

Even in writing, according to the curriculum, we practice narrative and evaluative, and in the exam, they test them interactive and informative. We give them four types of writing, it is correct but students' minds where, I think it's better in first semester to concentrate two types, the second semester the other.

(T4, female, 9 years of experience, Omani)

In grade 12, the syllabus includes the four types of writing. However, teachers claimed that they practised and emphasised two types more because they are supposed to be kept in the student's portfolio as evidence for the moderation committee. As a result, teachers do not have enough time to practise the other two genres because of the limited time period, and the students are not interested in practising them as these two writing genres are not awarded marks in the CA, they are only tested in the semester test.

Another example of a mismatch between teaching and testing that was mentioned by the majority of PBETs was memorising vocabulary. From my own experience and the teacher's response below (T1, female, 9 years of experience, Omani), the students become accustomed to studying vocabulary only from the glossary, which is found at the end of the course book. However, the situation in the Post-Basic Education curriculum is different from that which they had in C2 (grades 5–10). The students are confused about what to study for the vocabulary as there is a 'glossary of words' at the end of each unit and there are some words printed in bold that the teachers ask the students to focus on and to memorise. Nevertheless, the students are not always tested on the vocabulary from these two sources (the words in bold text and the glossary of words). They might also be tested on any of the vocabulary presented in the course book.

Thus, teachers claimed that memorizing vocabulary items might demotivate the students and discourage them from learning vocabulary as learning language is not only memorizing vocabulary; that is to say, memorization serves to support lower-thinking skills (Allen et al., 2002; Ertmer& Newby, 1993; Merriam, et al., 2007), whereas the Basic Education syllabus is designed to expose students to a wider range of vocabulary and encourage students to use language in different contexts (Ministry of Education, 2010). Besides, the number of marks that are given to vocabulary and grammar questions (15% in grade 11 and 10% in grade 12) in the semester test might not make it worthwhile for some students to memorise all of the vocabularies in the glossary as not all are tested. The responses below indicate teachers' perspectives on memorising isolated vocabulary:

Students are fed up of memorizing vocabulary; they say why we memorize, vocabulary, and we don't get them in the exam.

(T9, male, 5 years of experience, non-Omani)

Students burn themselves and study vocabulary. It doesn't come from the glossary. Students study glossary of each theme but they get only 4 out of ten words, am thinking of those poor students who study the glossary for 5 units and they stop and get paralysed when they don't know the answer and they know that they will lose marks.

(T1, female, 9 years of experience, Omani)

The above responses revealed that teachers are not asking the students to memorise vocabulary.

(ii) Exam-based oriented teaching and learning

As a result of the greater weight placed on the summative dimension of assessment by exam, to the detriment of the formative, continuous dimension of the assessment carried out by teachers, greater emphasis was placed by the respondents on the former dimension. This weighting has an impact on the teachers' work and the students' development of their linguistic competencies.

Furthermore, due to time limitations, the students' low aptitude and an inflexible course book that must be finished within a limited period (Al-Issa, 2002; Al-Jardani, 2012), PBETs are

unable to improve the students' level much within one or two years at the Post-Basic Education level. This may explain why Post-Basic Education students enter higher education institutions with low language competence to the extent that some of them cannot even construct a simple sentence or write their names in English.

One major tool for the student assessment is the student portfolio, which was raised by the PBETs during the interview in referring to issues involved in the assessment. As mentioned earlier, Post-Basic Education students are assessed based on the work that they complete in their portfolios. In the PBETs' view, the portfolios are an extra burden on teachers as they have to track students' progress and get them to finish the tasks. Teachers have to have two pieces of evidence for each type of writing students do because they are held responsible by the examination committees (moderation committee). Some of the PBETs believed that the portfolio does not give tangible evidence for students' level, as some can obtain ready-made materials from previous years' portfolios and put them in their portfolios. As one male teacher declared:

The portfolio is out of 30, at least he (the student) will get 20 to 25, this is middle and weak students, and in the exam, it is easy to get 20 (out of 70) marks ... they [students] are only concentrating on marks to pass the exam. From my experience here, and my experience outside, and from what I'm reading, there is a gap between the curriculum itself and the exams; there is a phenomenon, which is that parents and students know that there is no need for the book at all.

(T5, male, 13 years of experience, non-Omani)

Moreover, the PBETs believed that students' awareness of the fact that they can pass even if they get low marks (with D grades) in the semester test might give the students the impression that English is not a major communicative language that they need to acquire for higher studies and the labour market, and thus they see proficiency in English as merely one requirement for completion of Post-Basic Education (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2016).

4.2.5 The social dialogue between higher education and Post-Basic Education schools

Both PBETs and LCTs highlighted social dialogue as another theme relevant for the present study. According to Maunganidze (2015) and Vere (2007), social dialogue is defined as all forms of communication, information sharing, negotiation and consultation between all educational authorities (private and public), teachers and their organisations at all levels. Social dialogue is vital for achieving educational outcomes. The involvement of teachers in such a dialogue is essential, and it is difficult to obtain reform goals without their involvement (Ratteree, 2012; Vere, 2007). Vere (2007) calls it “glue for successful education reform” (p. iii). In a transition research project by Peel, conducted in 1996 and 1997 (as cited in Sheard et al., 2003), it was found that secondary school teachers and the students expressed a strong desire for an interactive discussion with university teachers and university students.

Creating social dialogue was one of the topics the PBETs and LCTs raised in the interviews. They revealed a desire for building ‘communication’ bridges between the MOE’s different organisations, especially the schools and the higher education institutes. They also insisted that there must be an association between parents and schools as Omani students are not exposed to English, except in class for 40 minutes (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012; Al-Jardani, 2012). They believe that parents might have a positive role in teaching their children that English is important and is not only an exam subject.

Some PBETs suggested that the MOE should involve more teachers in evaluating the curriculum and some proposed reducing the number of themes in the course books at the all-school level. However, teachers stated that not all their recommendations are taken into consideration; they also claimed that there was little communication and negotiation between teachers and the higher authorities at the MOE. When PBETs were asked whether the MOE accepted their suggestions and recommendations, the responses varied between “yes”, “no immediate action”, “somehow but very slowly changes”, and “never” (Table 13).

Table 13: Post-Basic Education teachers and Language Centre teachers’ responses about institutional dialogue

<p>We just don’t want to be unfair, they (the MOE) listen, but it goes slowly.</p> <p>(T5, male, 13 years of experience, non-Omani)</p>
<p>From time to time they ask us. We have meetings, and they respond. I remember when I revised the grade 11 coursebook and skills book.</p> <p>(T7, male, 8 years of experience, non-Omani)</p>
<p>Immediately! It won’t be immediate everything take time.</p> <p>(T6, female, 8 years of experience, Omani)</p>
<p>Regarding curriculum, yes, they made a lot of modification; they took 90% of our suggestions. But not in evaluation. It’s never happened. They don’t respect our opinion. They are experts, but we are in the field.</p> <p>(T10, female, 8 years of experience, Omani)</p>

The above responses indicate that PBETs were satisfied with the decision to reduce the number of topics in grade 12 so that teachers could have more autonomy to adapt the course book according to the students’ needs; nevertheless, they were disappointed with the assessment system. Both LC teachers and PBETs stated that there is no formal contact, discussion or negotiation between them, and both groups expressed their enthusiasm and willingness to have such contact. This finding resonates with those of Al-Najar (2016b), which acknowledge an existing gap, that is to say, “poor harmonisation” (p. 12), between higher education institutions and the MOE, which has negative consequences in the students’ preparation for higher education and professional careers.

Additionally, female PBETs claimed that there was no dialogue between them and higher education teachers, whereas male teachers had some contact that enabled them to see and hear first-year students’ struggles and disappointment with the higher education organisations. Both groups firmly believe that promoting a social dialogue between the teachers in schools and those

in higher education institutions would improve students' educational levels, as the female teachers interviewed stated, and as presented in Table 14 below.

Table 14: Teachers' responses about the lack of communication between schools and higher education institutions

<p>I have contact with some private college teachers but not SQU teachers. We used to meet in British Council; they make workshops. We discuss teaching methods.</p> <p>(T10, female, 8 years of experience, Omani)</p>
<p>I believe there should be a strong connection and communication between schools and the university at institutional level, not only at students' level.</p> <p>(LCT4, female, 11 years of experience, Omani)</p>
<p>I don't have. If there is contact at least, we would understand our students better. I want to know what students were taught in the past.</p> <p>(LCT1 male, 5 years of experience, Omani)</p>

4.3. The quantitative data (Phase II)

Descriptive statistics aim to describe and organise data in a meaningful way, using visual aids such as tables or charts. Inferential statistics, in turn, help in drawing conclusions and, where possible to make findings from the sample generalisable to the larger population. (Al-Hemyari, 2018). Thus, the use of different statistics as appropriate to the research questions and the kind of data under analysis is critical to the development of a reasonable interpretation of the data collected (Al-Jardani, 2013).

As I mentioned earlier, all previous studies have built only on students' perspectives, and this presents only one side of the picture. My study has, therefore, included the voices of teachers as they are the actors directly implicated in the phenomenon under investigation. However, to complete the picture of all parties involved in the teaching and learning process, students also were included in my study. It is important to listen to students' voices when aiming to improve

their learning (Chidzonga, 2014; Groves & Welsh, 2010). In the particular case of my study the inclusion of the students' perspectives was meant to serve two main purposes: (i) to seek convergence through triangulation thus ensuring reliability and validity (Creswell, 2014), and ii) to contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon through looking for possible patterns of response in association with different variables of context and the sociodemographic characteristics of the students. Concerning statistical analysis, 5%, that is $P < 0.05$ was adopted as the cut-off value for significance (

4.3.1. Factor analysis

The purpose of factor analysis is to reduce the number of variables into a smaller set of variables and see how those variables correlate (Williams et al., 2010; Wetzel, 2011; Hof, 2012; Pallant, 2016). The second section of my questionnaire included a scale aimed at covering five domains: teaching approach (12 items), teachers' rapport and understanding (5 items), curriculum (7 items), assessment (6 items), and social dialogue domain (4 items) (Appendix 4). These domains were the most frequent topics raised by the interviewees, and they were also found in the literature. I conducted the factor analysis to examine how these items loaded under the five domains and how they correlated.

There are two main types of factor analysis: Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). CFA is used to test the hypothesis that a relationship exists between the observed variables and their underlying latent construct (Williams et al., 2010). It requires a researcher to hypothesise, in advance, the number of factors and how these factors are correlated. By contrast, in EFA a researcher is not required to have any specific hypotheses about how many factors will emerge (Williams et al., 2010; Ngure et al., 2015). Because I had no hypotheses to test in my study, I used EFA to examine the relationships between individual variables (e.g., items on a scale) and to extract latent factors from the measured variables (Williams et al., 2012; Osborne, 2015).

The first step in EFA was to examine whether it was appropriate to run factor analysis with the sample and the dispersion of the data. This was done by checking the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. The Kaiser-Meyer-

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy test indicates the proportion of variance in the variables likely to be caused by underlying factors. High values (close to 1.0) generally indicate that it may be useful to run factor analysis with the data. The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, in turn, assesses the identity matrix nature of the correlation matrix, thus is indicating the degree of relationship among the variables. Small values (less than 0.05) of the significance level indicate that factor analysis may be appropriate (Ngure et al., 2015; Pallant, 2016).

In my study, the test for factor analysis showed that KMO was 0.893 (Table 9). Values between 0.7 and 0.8 are acceptable, and values above 0.9 are superb (Hof, 2012; Pallant, 2016). Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant, too at 0.00 level (Ngure et al., 2015) (Table 15).

Table 15: KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.893
Approx. Chi-Square		1451.007
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Df	105
	Sig.	.000

The second step was running Principal Axis Factoring (PAF) on the 33 items. It is the most widely used method in factor analysis, which “restricts the variance that is common among variables” (Ngure et al., 2015, p. 1). The PAF procedure suggested the existence of six factors, as shown in Table 16 below.

Table 16 Rotated Component Matrix

Rotated Component Matrix

Items	Factors					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
My English teacher in Post-Basic school...						
1. asked me to memorise vocabulary						.718
2. taught me grammar rules in Arabic language		-.383				.643
3. taught me grammar rules in English		.609			-.347	
4. talked to me in English				.767		
5. encouraged me more to work in pairs and in group to practice English	.455	.474				
6. encouraged me to make oral presentations	.434	.633				
7. encouraged me to speak English in the class	.314	.713				
8. encouraged me to practice projects in English (wall paper magazine, meet people, visit some places and write reports.....etc.)		.577	.350		.305	
9. asked me to read different types of texts (dialogues, letters, reports, stories, instructions, etc.)		.666				
10. used the course book to teach me English	.532	.352				
11. gave me extra activities to improve my English	.336	.568		.353		
12. required me to do homework		.639				
13. understood my difficulties	.427	.415				
14. told me how English is important for studying at the university					.878	
15. encouraged me to participate in the class even when I made mistakes	.784					
16. developed a good relationship with me	.801					
17. cared about me	.785					
18. used different materials (videos, pictures, newspaper articles, etc.) to teach me English	.570	.347		.367		

19. gave me different activities in the class (role play, simulations, etc.)	.513	.408		.314		
20. introduced more interesting topics in our English lessons	.626	.324				
21. gave me challenging activities to do in English	.546	.368	.400			
22. told me about some good websites to improve and practise English outside the school	.421	.405	.420			
23. encouraged me to use English outside the class	.343	.433	.460			
24. trained me for the English exam	.769					
25. explained my mistakes	.789					
26. gave me feedback about my work	.763					
27. told me how to improve my English	.765					
28. corrected my writing errors	.856					
29. corrected my speaking errors	.638		.381			
30. arranged with school administration visits to colleges and universities			.839			
31. invited people from higher education to clarify our questions and inquiries			.872			
32. arranged with the school to invite undergraduate students to talk about their experience			.855			
33. invited university teachers to observe his/her lessons			.779			

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 11 iterations.

Factor 1 (explaining 25.287 % of the variance in the data): (20) item load on this factor: items 5,6, 7,10,11,13,15,16,17,19, 20, 21, 22,23,24,25,26,27,28 and 29

Factor 2 (explaining 14.705% of variations): (17) items load on this factor: item 2,3,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,18,19,20,21,22 and 23.

Factor 3 (explaining 12.480% of variations): (7) items load on this factor: item 8, 21,22,23,29,30 and 31

Factor 4 (explaining 4.581% of variations): (4) items load on this factor: item 4,10,11,18 and 19

Factor 5 (explaining 4.083% of variations): (3) items load on this factor item 3,8 and14

Factor 6 (explaining 3.685% of variations): (2) items load on this factor item 1 and 2. Factors with 3 items were deleted, and items that were loaded in more than one factor were deleted. The PAF was rerun with the remaining items which led to the identification of two factors, namely teachers' performance and social dialogue (Table 17).

Table 17 Rotated Factor Matrix

Items	Factors	
	Teachers performance	Social dialogue
My English teacher in Post-Basic school...		
1. taught me grammar rules in Arabic language	-.383	
3. taught me grammar rules in English	.609	
10. used the course book to teach me English	.352	
12. required me to do homework	.639	
15. encouraged me to participate in the class even when I made mistakes	.784	
16. developed a good relationship with me	.801	
24. trained me for the English exam	.769	
25. explained my mistakes	.789	
26. gave me feedback about my work	.736	

27. told me how to improve my English	.765	
28. corrected my writing errors	.856	
30. arranged with school administration visits to colleges and universities		.839
31. invited people from higher education to clarify our questions and inquiries		.872
32. arranged with school to invite undergraduate students to talk about their experience		.855
33. invited university teachers to observe his/her lessons		.779

Table 16 indicates that there are 6 factors in the Rotated Component Matrix table. However, the percentage of the variance in data differs. That is the percentage of the variance in data for factor 1 is 25.2 and 14.7 for factor 2 and 12.4 for factor 3. By contrast, the percentage of the variance in data for factors 4, 5 and 6 was very low. Thus factors 4, 5 and 6 were extracted after rerunning the PAF. Factors 4, 5 and 6 were discarded for being weak. They included a small number of items (4, 3 and 2 items respectively) and explained 4.581%, 4.083% and 3.685% of the variations respectively.

Factor 3 did not appear to be strong due to double-loadings – items 5,6,7,8,11, 23 and the loading of item 2 (-.408).

Besides, a closer look at the items in factors 1,2 and 3 reveals that all the items in factor 1 and 2 are loaded and focus on teachers' role (teachers' performance), but factor 3 focuses only on

social dialogue. Therefore, table 17 indicates only two factors; teachers' performance and social dialogue.

Table 18 Omani Students responses to the two dimensions: Teachers' performance and social dialogue (N=168)

Dimensions	Items	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Often		Always		Mean
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
1. Teachers' performance	My English teacher in Post-Basic school...											
	2. taught me grammar rules in Arabic language.	45	26.8	42	25.0	44	26.2	33	19.6	4	2.4	2.46
	3. taught me grammar rules in English	4	4.8	8	18.5	31	32.1	54	42.3	71	4.8	4.07
	10. used the course book to teach me English	5	3.5	7	4.2	19	11.3	53	31.5	84	50	4.21
	12. required me to do homework	5	3.0	14	8.3	44	26.2	44	26.2	61	36.3	3.85
	15: encouraged me to participate in the class even when I made mistakes	7	4	12	7	40	24	44	26	65	39	3.89
	16: developed a good relationship with me	10	6.0	15	9.0	38	23	50	30	55	32	3.75
	24. trained me for the English exam	5	3.0	11	7	39	23	52	31	61	36.1	3.92
	25. explained my	4	2	14	8	48	29	59	35	43	26	4.0

	mistakes											
	26. gave me feedback about my work	6	4	18	11	44	26	37	22	63	37	3.80
	27. told me how to improve my English	5	3.0	20	12.0	41	24.0	50	30	52	31	3.74
	28: corrected my writing errors	3	2	11	7	19	11	42	25	93	55	4.27
	30. arranged with school administration visits to colleges and universities	75	45	36	21	37	22	14	8	6	4	2.04
	31. invited people from higher education to clarify our questions and inquiries	72	43	44	26	28	17	16	10	8	4	2.06
	32. arranged with the school to invite undergraduate students to talk about their experience	82	49	40	24	21	13.5	18	10.5	7	4	1.96
	33. invited university teachers to observe his/her lessons	88	52	27	16	32	19	16	10	5	3	1.91

Pearson's correlation test was conducted to check for the strength of the factor extraction. It must be noted that the Pearson correlation value does not indicate a cause-effect relationship between

the variables under analysis. The Pearson Correlation (r), which can range from -1 to 1, indicates the strength of the linear relationship between two variables. An r of -1 indicates a perfect negative linear relationship and +1 indicates a perfect positive linear relationship between variables (Mordkoff, 2016; Lane, 2011; Pallant, 2016).

As shown below in Table 19, the Pearson's correlation (r) is significant ($r = .175$, $p .024$). This confirms the strength of the factor extraction indicating that both factors are distinct and vary in the same direction. It is important to note, however, that the low correlation value ($r .175$) indicates that no direct cause-effect relationship can be assumed to exist between the two dimensions under analysis, suggesting that only in part can the teachers' performance, as perceived by the students, explain their perceived lack of dialogue between post-basic education and higher education.

Table 19 Pearson's correlations between the two factors

Factors		Social dialogue
Teachers' performance	Pearson Correlation	.175*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.024
	N	167

A quick look at the mean values of the two dimensions, as shown in Table 20, suggests that in the opinion of the students surveyed the teachers' performance dimension ($\bar{x} = 3.7172$) had a determinant role explaining the reasons for the students' low English language proficiency upon entrance to higher education in comparison with the social dialogue dimension ($\bar{x} = 1.9269$)

Table 20 Descriptive statistics for the two factors

Factors	Mean	Std. Deviation
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Teachers' performance	3.7172	.81300
Social dialogue	1.9269	1.04730

For the purpose of a more fine-grained analysis, the repeated measures/within-subjects test was performed to compare differences between the mean values of the factors under scrutiny. The results are shown in Table 20

Table 21 Within-Subjects Effects test

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig*	Partial Eta Squared
Application	274.048	1	274.048	439.036	.000	.721
Error	106.115	170	.624			

Sig* $P \leq 0.05$

Tables 20 and 21 show that the calculated value of F is a function at the level of <0.001 , which indicates that there are real differences between the two factors, teachers performance and the social dialogue. This also indicates that the students accorded greater importance to teachers' performance than social dialogue as factors impacting their lack of adequate preparation for pursuing studies in English at higher education level.

In view of these results, I thought it would be interesting to have a closer examination of the quantitative data to explore any possible association of between the two dimensions and some of the respondents' sociodemographic variables, specifically their areas of study and geographical location/governorates.

4.3.2 Students' perceptions across areas of studies

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) is a statistical method used to check if the means of two or more independent groups are significantly different from each other (Lane, 2011; Pallant, 2016). A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine if there were differences between students of

different areas of studies in their perceptions of teachers' performance and social dialogue as main reasons why learning English for twelve years in Omani public schools was inadequate preparation for them to pursue studies at higher education level.

For this purpose, the participants were divided into three main groups according to their areas of studies: (i) Science and Healthcare (medicine, nursing & marine science) (N= 59); (ii) Social Sciences and Law (including Education & Economy) (N= 71); and (iii) Engineering (N= 49). The results of the ANOVA test in Table 22 revealed that there were no significant differences among the three groups in their perceptions of both teachers performance [F 2, 163=.057, p= 0.56] and social dialogue [F 2, 162 =1.66, p= 0.19].

Table 22: Students' perceptions by areas of studies - ANOVA test

Dimensions		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Teachers performance	Between Groups	0.521	2	0.261	0.574	0.565
	Within Groups	74.068	163	0.454		
	Total	74.59	165			
Social dialogue	Between Groups	3.278	2	1.639	1.656	0.194
	Within Groups	160.358	162	0.99		
	Total	163.636	164			
	Within Groups	57.008	163	0.35		
	Total	58.079	165			

Sig* P≤0.05

Based on these findings it is possible to conclude that students from different areas of studies believe that both their teachers' performance and the lack of social dialogue between Post-Basic education students and the higher education are main reasons why learning English for twelve

years in Omani public schools was inadequate preparation for them to pursue studies at higher education level. This result is aligned with the previous results (Issa, 2002; Al Toubi, 1998).

4.3.3 Students' perceptions across regions/governorates

In view of the findings above, I was interested in determining if there were differences in the students' perceptions concerning geographic location in the country. For this purpose, the participants were divided into two groups: the capital city (N=35) and the other geographic areas (N=133), and a 2-tailed independent samples t-test was conducted. This is a pragmatic statistical procedure applied to a situation where there are two groups of independent variables. The independent samples t-test assesses whether the means of two groups are statistically different from each other (Ralla, 2014; Pallant, 2016).

Again, as represented in Table 23, it was found that there were no significant differences between the two groups in their perceptions of both teachers performance ($t= 1.042$, $p= .302$) and social dialogue ($t= -1.416$, $p=.162$) as main reasons why learning English for twelve years in Omani public schools was inadequate preparation for them to pursue studies at higher education level.

Table 23 Students' perceptions by geographic location-Independent Samples T-Test

Factors	Region	N	Mean	T
Teachers performance	Capital City	35	3.8977	1.042
	Other geographic areas	133	3.7563	
Social dialogue	Capital City	35	1.8024	-1.416

	Other geographic areas	132	2.0549	
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Sig* P≤0.05

4.4 Quantitative summary

Although both factors are relevant, it is worth emphasising the greater role of the teachers' performance factor when compared to social dialogue as shown in table 20 (the mean for the teachers' performance is 3.7 and 1.9 for the social dialogue). This could be explained by the fact that students believe that teachers performance plays a major role in their requiring a foundation programme rather than the social dialogue. On the other hand, factor analysis tests (tables 22 and 23) indicate that students in all the colleges and in all the governorates believe that both teachers' performance and social dialogue are the two main factors why learning English for twelve years in Omani public schools is inadequate preparation for Omani students to pursue studies at higher education level. These two main factors could explain, in part, why the phenomenon under study remains the same across the country that is at the national level and across areas of study.

The post-basic education students' inadequate preparation in English could also be explained as a result of the PBETs being exam-oriented, placing a focus on the course book and the requirement to complete the syllabus within a limited time (Al-Issa, 2002; Al-Jardani, 2012). Besides, quantitative results confirm that teachers cared more about preparing students for the exam than they did about improving their competencies in the four language skills or in using English for communicative purposes in different contexts (see items 24 and 25 in table 15).

4.5 Conclusion

Many factors influence students' lack of preparedness to pursue studies in higher education. In the Omani context, as the testimony confirmed, lack of proficiency in English appears to have a detrimental effect on Omani graduate students' achievement in the higher education institutions

as it may result in up to two years spent on the foundation programme. The foundation programme can facilitate students' transition from one learning level to another. However, the higher education context is not the place to teach students the basics and achieve the learning objectives that are supposed to have been accomplished in grades 1 to 12. Therefore, it appears essential to explore the phenomenon under study from different sources (teachers' perspectives and students' perspectives), unlike in the previous studies that focused only on students' perspectives. Based on all participants' perspectives (PBETs, LCTs and students) both quantitative and qualitative results indicate that teachers' performance and social dialogue are important factors impacting the students' proficiency in English and consequently their preparation to pursue studies at higher education level where English is the medium of instruction. This, in turn, explains the students' inadequate preparation in English upon entrance to higher education level. Using two sources of data was advantageous to the extent that it allowed the voices of the different actors to complement each other, to validate the findings from each perspective, and to reduce the impact of researcher bias. In contrast to the previous studies, the present study used both qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a better understanding of the phenomenon under analysis and to produce a more accurate interpretation and discussion of the results.

Chapter 5

Discussion of the findings

The temple of learning has many floors, but one thing is common to those in charge of every floor — they are dissatisfied with the training on the floor below. It is what you might call an endemic complaint.

(Genn, 1971, as cited in Sigei, 2007, p. 2)

5.1 Introduction

Previous studies (Al-Bakri, 2013; Ismail, 2011; Sivaraman et al., 2014) have found that Omani diploma students encounter some challenges while transitioning to higher education institutions in which English is used as the medium of instruction. Researchers have claimed that the majority of Omani diploma students (more than 80%) have to spend at least one semester completing an additional English foundation programme to be competent to study in higher education institutions (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012; Al-Mamari, 2012; Issan& Gomaa, 2010; Oxford Business Group, 2013; Sergon, 2011). The present study explores why learning English for twelve years in Omani public schools is inadequate preparation for Omani students to pursue studies at higher education level. Previous studies addressed this issue but only from the students' perspectives, whereas my study has combined collective perspectives from teachers and students, as they together form the main components of the education system.

- The findings of the present study point to several factors that help explain why the Post-Basic Education students in this context are required to complete the English foundation programme to pursue studies at higher education level. These factors fall into four main categories:
- Students' low level of English when transitioning from Basic Education to Post-Basic Education;
- The approach to teaching and learning English at the Post-Basic Education level;
- English teachers' needs in terms of training and continuing professional development; and
- An absence of inter-institutional dialogue between Post-Basic schools and higher education institutions.

5.2 Students' low levels of English when transitioning from Basic Education to higher education institutions

The challenges in using English that Omani students face when entering higher education originate at the lower level of schooling, Basic Education. The testimony of all Post-Basic Education and Language Centre teachers indicates that they agree and believe that students are not well prepared by the first two education cycles (Cycles 1 and 2). When students transition to Post-Basic Education, they encounter different challenges, to the extent that some of them cannot even write simple sentences. These students, with their difficulties and weaknesses, then shift to higher education. These results concur with the results of a study conducted in 2003 on the first cycle of Basic Education (grade 4) by the Ministry of Education (Al-Shabibi&Silvennoinen, 2017; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2010; Watt, 2013). In 2003, tests were administered in Arabic, English, mathematics and science to 7,700 grade 4 pupils in all regions of the Sultanate of Oman. That study, conducted by the Ministry of Education, concluded that students in grade 4 were one year behind international standards. That study aimed to measure students' levels in different subjects. By contrast, the present study has focused on English as a particular subject. It built on different perspectives and used different qualitative and quantitative approaches to investigate why learning English for twelve years in Omani public schools is inadequate preparation for Omani students to pursue studies at higher education level.

Al-Mahrooqi's (2012) study refers to some major causes of students' low level of English, such as the low English proficiency of teachers in low grades, teachers' use of simple language in classrooms and their preoccupation with finishing the assigned curriculum. Besides, she suggests that the first grade of Basic Education does not effectively ground students in English; both the Basic and General Education curricula are weak, and that no tutorials or remedial lessons are available for weak students. In support of Al-Mahrooqi's (2012) claims, Al-Najar (2016a, 2016b) has claimed that "the reasons behind the pupils' weaknesses in their skills and abilities were teaching methods and the Basic Education curriculum (BEC) content" (2016a, p. 15). She added that the Basic Education curriculum is "the first stage" (2016a, p. 15) in which students are taught essential skills to prepare them for the Post-Basic Education. However, both

studies only investigated students' perspectives, and there was no 'voice' of the teachers presented in their studies. Conversely, the present study builds on both students' and teachers' perspectives.

The findings of the present study can be discussed, at least in part, in the light of Bernstein's code theory (Bernstein, 2003a; Bernstein, 2003b; Cause, 2010; Wei, 2014), more specifically his three message systems' - curriculum, pedagogy and teacher-student interaction—which play a critical role in shaping students' values and practical views of the world. Childhood and the early school age are critical periods because students develop a rapport with teachers and a liking for particular school subjects and they have the opportunity to build self-esteem and gain the skills required for further levels of education (Laxmi, 2016; Zhan & Le, 2004). It is also stated in the English Language Curriculum Framework (Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 11) that the curriculum for grades 1 to 4 is the cornerstone of the linguistic and attitudinal foundation of later grades. Thus, the approach to teaching and the curriculum appear to be critical in building students' foundation for lifelong learning (Laxmi, 2016). In this context, it is important to raise Basic Education teachers' awareness of the learning objectives stated in the English Language Curriculum Framework through their involvement in continuing professional development and, in particular, designed in-service initiatives. According to the general objectives for Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 students, as stated in the Framework, these students should develop listening, speaking, writing, and reading and study skills. They should also develop an awareness of the English language as a communication tool (p. 13).

It seems from the interviews in the present study that Post-Basic Education teachers are aware that in Cycles 1 and 2 students have not achieved the skills and learning objectives that are necessary to allow them to succeed in the Post-Basic Education syllabus. Many Post-Basic Education teachers believe that grades 11 and 12 are not suitable grades to remedy students' weakness and teach them the basic skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening. Many students cannot write a correct sentence when they enter the Post-Basic Education schools. However, from the Post-Basic Education teachers' point of view, they can do little to address students' weaknesses and challenges because of: (i) the obligation to cover the entire syllabus; and (ii) the need to train the students for the exams they must take at the end of each semester. Post-Basic Education teachers believe that the best assistance they can offer is to emphasise the

exam-type questions that require students to memorise vocabulary and grammar to pass the exams. Teachers' beliefs about language teaching and learning have a great influence on their teaching methods and aims (Altan, 2006 Xu, 2012). Xu (2012) stated that if the aim of teaching a second or foreign language is to pass an exam, then this will have significant implications on teachers' teaching approaches. In other words, teaching will tend to be at the level of drilling and memorising grammatical rules and vocabulary. However, if we see learning a new language as a lifelong process and as a tool for communication, then we will take a very different approach to teach it (Altan, 2006; Al-Bulushi et al., 2017).

As mentioned earlier, the Post-Basic Education teachers highlighted students' previous learning experiences because the activities in which young elementary school children engage and their learning environment are crucial factors in gaining knowledge, obtaining problem-solving skills, and developing the skills necessary for a successful transition to and performance in higher education and professional life (Gray & MacBlain, 2015; Thomas, 2008).

To some extent, the assumption that Post-Basic Education teachers believe that they cannot remedy students' weaknesses because what students had learned in the early stage (C1) has its impact at Post-Basic Education level (grades 11 and 12) could be true. It is worth mentioning here that a gap that exists between teachers' espoused theories and theories in use (Argyris, Putnam, & Smith, 1995). Teachers might sometimes use teaching approaches that do not align with what they believe. Teachers' approaches to foreign language teaching vary according to individual factors, including their experience, the type of training they received and their personal beliefs (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012; Issan & Gomaa, 2010).

Teachers in Oman (Omanis or non-Omanis) have different experiences. Some are recruited from neighbouring countries, some are fresh graduates, and some others have little experience (Al-Jardani, 2012). Furthermore, some teachers still use traditional teaching methods (e.g., grammar-translation and the audio-lingual approach) and others follow the teachers' guide to the letter (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012). Therefore, these results indicate that, although the teachers in Post-Basic Education encourage students to speak English and they do not use Arabic (L1) in class, the students' low proficiency prevents them from understanding their teachers' instructions and hinders communication. This is one possible explanation for the apparent contradiction between

the participants' claims during the interviews that teachers are not qualified, and they did not prepare them to pursue their higher studies, and the pattern of the students' responses to the questionnaire where students' expressed their opinions about Post-Basic Education teachers' using learner-centred approaches to teach English. Therefore, it is the quality of the teachers' practices and beliefs that, to a large extent, impacts students' achievement (Ministry of Education & World Bank, 2012; Kaymakamoğlu, 2018; Khader, 2012; Mohammad, 2015).

Besides, research has revealed that teachers' pre-established beliefs about teaching and learning limit their ability to implement innovative practices. In this regard, Mohammad (2011) asserted that "sometimes the English teachers' teaching methods and cultural norms may affect the students' language learning strategies" (p. 70). Farrell (1999), in Singapore, asked five pre-service teachers to write about their previous experiences as students of English and state whether they implemented inductive or deductive approaches when teaching grammar. Some participants admitted to adopting the approaches that they were exposed to when they were in school, regardless of whether these approaches motivated their students.

Another interpretation of the Post-Basic Education teachers' opinions regarding students' weaknesses and challenges is the size of classes in Basic Education schools in Oman. Large classes and the need to teach for exam purposes may also account for the survey students' feelings of under-achievement in English at the Post-Basic school level. These issues were not raised in the questionnaire; however, Post-Basic Education teachers mentioned them in the interviews. This illustrates the significance of obtaining data from different sources of information in obtaining a more comprehensive understanding. Although some PBETs may favour the communicative approach, they feel compelled to prepare their students for the exam-type questions and, thus, they ultimately "teach to the test" (Copland, Garton, & Burns, 2014, p. 741). Furthermore, it may be the case that the students do not have sufficient opportunities for communicative activities by being part of large classes (30+) (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012; Copland et al., 2014). Additionally, the students could be lacking self-confidence to practise English in communicative activities, when the number of students in a class ranges from 25 to 30 in Cycle 1, and up to 35 in Cycle 2.

The issue of large class size is relevant in the Omani context, where sometimes many Basic Education teachers are novices or often part-time expatriate teachers who are expected to have effective classroom management techniques to control over 30 students while simultaneously understanding those students' individual needs, weaknesses, strengths, motivations, backgrounds, aptitudes and attitudes towards learning in both classroom and informal settings (Al-Shabibi & Silvennoinen, 2017; Bahanshal, 2013; Rubio, 2009). Large classes hinder teachers' attempt to identify students' needs in C1 and C2, which makes students move from one level to another with the same difficulties and challenges. It seems that C1 and C2 teachers were not well prepared to transit students from restricted to elaborated code, as Bernstein mentioned in his code theory (Bernstein, 2003a; Bernstein, 2003b).

Post-Basic Education teachers admitted in interviews that it is not easy to remedy students' weaknesses or to change their attitudes in grades 11 or 12. The best they can do is to practise exam-type questions which enable students to pass the semester exams. Besides, large classes are one reason why teachers focus on a 'drilling' approach rather than on an 'interaction' approach, enabling students to memorise the vocabulary and the rules of grammar perfectly, but not enabling them to use language as a communication tool. The findings of the present study indicate that the majority of the students were not satisfied with the Basic Education syllabus, and they claimed that it did not prepare them for the higher education level. Many students, in the interviews, claimed that the attendance of the foundation programme was in result of the Post-Basic Education curriculum's ineffectiveness in preparing them for higher education; it is based mainly on memorising vocabulary and learning grammar rules. That is, students did not practise how to use the English language in different contexts as advocated in the guidelines of the Ministry of Education (2010).

This, however, is problematic, because, in Oman, graduation from a College of Education and completion of an induction course, or of workshops in teaching Basic Education, are the qualification requirements for teaching at any level. Teachers in Oman are trained and encouraged to implement a learner-centred approach in Basic Education schools. However, many still use traditional methods, and only a few teachers are capable of implementing student-centred learning techniques (Al-Maskri et al., 2012; Al-Shabibi & Silvennoinen, 2017).

Al-Shabibi and Silvennoinen (2017) propose that, although teachers are familiar with student-centred learning techniques, “they regard their single most important objective being to ensure the completion of the syllabus and preparing their students for examination” (p. 8). Copland et al. (2014) have stated that, in many countries, teachers believe that it is difficult or even impossible to introduce student-centred teaching with large classes, or to closely monitor students’ language use, or to implement pair work and group work activities in large classes.

Although class size is a debated issue among researchers, it has generally been found that teachers prefer small classes (Bahanshal, 2013) rather than those with more than 30 to interact with students and understand their needs. Also, it has been found that there is an association between the lower class sizes and better test results, fewer dropouts and higher graduation rates among disadvantaged children (Higgins, 2014; New Schools Network, 2015). In general, small classes are preferable for young learners as they need special attention from teachers, they tend to have short attention spans, they become bored quickly and easily and have a lot of physical energy (Prabowo, 2015; Shin, 2006).

Understanding students’ needs and interests are referred to in the literature as individualised learning, which can be described as “another important method for teachers to apply in their classes to make sure that each student understands on the same line with the teacher” (Al-Maskri et al., 2012, p. 41). This method assists students in learning at their own pace (Basye, 2016). Pretti-Frontczak and Bricker (in Boat, Dinnebeil, & Bae, 2010) claimed that four steps could be used to individualize teaching: “(1) get to know each child’s interests, needs, and abilities (2) create opportunities for learning that build on children’s interest (3) scaffold children’s learning through supportive interactions (4) monitor children’s progress toward achieving important goals” (pp. 3–4). Here the findings in the present study illustrate a conflict between the teaching methods advocated by the Ministry of Education and those that are used in practice. It is difficult to follow the methods of individualised learning when having to cope with large class sizes.

It is therefore important to understand whether individualised teaching methods can be implemented in Cycle 1 and 2 classes consisting of 30 to 35 students. To overcome this problem, Al-Maskri et al. (2012) and Bahanshal (2013) suggested other teaching methods, such

as peer teaching and group work, that enable teachers to monitor students and provide them with different activities. In this regard, Prabowo (2015) suggests that,

good teachers at this level need to provide a rich diet of learning experiences which encourages their students to get information from a variety of sources. They need to work with their students individually and in groups developing good relationship. They need to plan a range of activities for a given time period, and be flexible enough to move on to the next exercise when they see their students getting bored. (p. 39)

In previous studies, the concept of individualised teaching and the effect of class size were not discussed. As mentioned above, most of the previous studies were conducted by academic staff who may not have been familiar with, or aware of, the situation in C1 and C2 schools. As an English senior supervisor who observes and mentors teachers in C1, C2 and Post- Basic Education schools, I have direct contact and knowledge of the C1, C2 and Post-Basic schools context. Unlike most previous studies, my study combines different sources and different perspectives, while my personal experience of the Basic and Post-Basic Education System contributes to paying a closer attention to these types of factors which emerge in my study as reasons that help explain the Post-Basic education students' weak level of proficiency in English when transitioning to higher education.

However, from the students' point of view (as in chapter 4) there were only two main reasons why completing the English foundation programme is still required for them to pursue studies at higher education level: teachers' performance and social dialogue. The difference between the students' perspective and the teachers' perspective might be related to the fact that students, with their more limited knowledge, were not aware of the other factors such as students' previous education, training or the demands of the assessment.

5.3 Approaches to teaching and learning English at the Basic and Post-Basic Education levels

Participants' testimony in the interviews and in the questionnaire indicated that Post-Basic Education teachers' approaches are one of the reasons for post-basic education students' inadequate preparation in English. The findings suggest that issues with approaches to teaching

and learning arise largely in association with factors related to curriculum management, evaluation and teachers' difficulties addressing such factors.

5.3.1 Curriculum management: The divide between the official and the taught curriculum

The testimony of the students interviewed in the present study suggested that the majority of their PBETs still use a teacher-centred approach in teaching English, even though the Ministry of Education's Basic Education system adopts a student-centred approach. Students perceived that, because of the teaching approach teachers used, they did not feel motivated or interested in learning English. In their responses to the questionnaire (items 1 and 10) students indicated that Post-Basic Education teachers asked them to memorise vocabulary and used the course book to teach them English. This agreement explains why the interviewed students perceived that the Post-Basic Education course book they used was boring or ineffective in terms of preparing them for study at a higher education level.

Factors associated with the curriculum may also account for the present findings. Al-Najar (2016b), for example, found that, despite the students' recognition of the importance of English, "almost one-third of respondents thought that PBEC did not help them achieve this in practice" (p. 19). Al-Najar's participants believed that PBEC failed to prepare them for either higher education or the labour market. It is likely that, in the context of the present study, the Post-Basic Education syllabus includes some communicative activities which may not be sufficient to enable the students to gain the effective communication skills that are required in higher education or in work situations.

Moates (2006) states that the PBEC is supposed to be based on a communicative and skills-based methodology, aimed at encouraging students' active participation and avoiding teacher-dominance. Although the Ministry of Education has implemented new educational reforms (Basic Education in 1998) and put a great deal of emphasis on training teachers to adopt student-centred approaches and not to base their teaching on rote learning and memorization, many teachers may still use traditional teaching techniques for one reason or another (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012; Issan & Gomaa, 2010). As Issan and Gomaa (2010) argued,

One can say that teachers are not well prepared and trained to implement the new programme... schools are equipped with computers and labs, but are teachers prepared to cope with the new technology and exchange knowledge? The majority are not aware of applying strategies of teaching and learning vocational skills. The in-service training applied was designed for short periods known as 'hit and run', with no time for application.(p. 26)

The findings of previous studies suggest that the lack of communication skills can be partly a result of teachers' lack of training in teaching English communicatively (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012; Al-Mahrooqi, 2012; Issan& Gomaa, 2010; Ministry of Education & World Bank, 2012). This lack of training may explain a tendency to teach English as a subject, focused on memorisation of grammar rules and vocabulary lists and not as a communicative tool. Richards (2006) claimed that;

grammatical competence is a necessary dimension of language learning. However, it is obviously not all that is involved in learning a language. Students might master the rules of sentence formation in a language and still not be very successful in using the language for meaningful communication. (p. 3)

The above findings (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012; Al-Mahrooqi, 2012; Issan& Gomaa, 2010; Ministry of Education & World Bank, 2012) suggest that more efforts are required to train teachers to adopt new teaching and learning methodologies. However, according to the Ministry of Education and the World Bank (2012), it seems that previous training has had little impact in schools and so further research exploring the quality of training and teachers' opinions regarding its efficacy is required. Despite concerns that there has been no systematic research conducted on the effect of in-service teacher training in Oman, there is some evidence to suggest that teachers do not respond positively to it (Ministry of Education & World Bank, 2012). Feedback from in-service training carried out in 2009 revealed that teachers criticized the in-service training courses for the following reasons: "(1) the training was over-theoretical, (2) the training was delivered in a didactic manner and did not respond to the participants' issues, and (3) the

trainers were not sufficiently expert in the content” (Ministry of Education & World Bank, 2012, p. 130).

Sergon (2011) investigated Omani students’ struggles with the English language from different points of view, including teachers’ and students’ perspectives, and concluded that the Ministry of Education (MOE) blamed the students for not being motivated, and the students blamed the teachers and the curriculum. Sergon (2011) claimed that the curriculum needed to be reformed to be more relevant to the students. He also recommended providing better-qualified teachers who can implement innovative methods likely to promote students’ linguistic competencies and thus reduce their problems when entering higher education.

These results indicate that, despite the changes implemented by the MOE to improve the Oman’s education system, the Post-Basic English curriculum has not yet achieved its aims because students finish secondary education without the language skills required to access higher education or to enter the labour market (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012; Al-Najar, 2016a, 2016b; Ministry of Education, 2004). It is worth mentioning that research has indicated that teachers’ conscious or unconscious beliefs about teaching and learning language may influence their classroom practice, their behaviour and make them open to new approaches and ideas or lead them to reject changes (Gabrys- Barker, 2010; Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017; Xu, 2012; Wang, 2016).

However, the use of a teacher-centred approach can be attributed to several underlying causes: the first is that PBETs are more concerned with finishing the syllabus than with teaching English as a communication tool. The syllabus in every public school must be completed on time regardless of students’ comprehension of the materials (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012; Al-Jardani, 2012; Sergon, 2011). Student participants in the present study indeed acknowledged that an inappropriate syllabus and a lack of communication activities at the Post-Basic Education level had a negative impact on their preparation for higher education. From my perspective, the findings of this study provide tangible evidence that can be presented to trainers, curriculum designers, and assessment departments to inform the development of more effective teacher training programmes and teaching materials which may enable students to pursue their higher education studies with the language proficiency required.

On the other hand, Post-Basic Education teachers revealed another perspective regarding the Post-Basic Education syllabus. In their interviews, they reported that they could adapt the syllabus according to the students' needs, but there are other factors that might cause poor language proficiency at higher education level, such as having limited time, students' low level of language proficiency when they reach grades 11 and 12, and teaching only to prepare students for the exams (espoused theories and theories in use). That is, the students' responses to the questionnaire (item 10) show that their Post-Basic Education teachers are concerned more about finishing the syllabus, but the Post-Basic Education teachers' responses in the interviews illustrate that those teachers are willing to adapt the syllabus according to the students' needs. These findings support the idea of the teacher being a curriculum manager and having an active role in curriculum development; teachers' suggestions should be incorporated into the curriculum for development (Alsubaie, 2016; Patankar & Jadhav, 2013). That is, the teachers' role should go beyond the implementation stage, as they are, with their knowledge, experienced and aware of students' needs, and this is the most important factor in making any curriculum development.

Thus, the results of the present study diverge from Al-Mahrooqi's (2012) claim that the curriculum is "a measure cause" (p. 266) of poor language proficiency. Al-Mahrooqi interpreted her findings based only on questionnaire data and using only students as a source of information. The responses of both Post-Basic Education and Language Centre teachers revealed that students are almost always working below the expected level, which prevents them from understanding the materials and accomplishing the tasks at higher grades. This result confirms that students did not successfully transit from the restricted level to elaborated level.

Some PBETs asserted that there were Basic Education students who had reached grades 11 and 12 and who were still unable to write a correct sentence or even their names in English. These results are in line with other studies that have identified the inadequacy of the Post-Basic Education curriculum in preparing students for higher education and the labour market (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012; Al-Najar, 2016a, 2016b; Issan & Gomaa, 2010; Ministry of Education & World Bank, 2012; Sergon, 2011).

The results of the present study support the findings from the above studies, namely the students' view of the inadequacy of the Post-Basic Education syllabus, a view that was shared by the teachers interviewed in the present study. It is important to note that the results of all studies, including the present study, agree that the Post-Basic Education syllabus does not prepare students for higher education studies. However, according to the data collected from the Post-Basic Education teachers' interviews, the Post-Basic Education teachers think that the Basic Education syllabus could be adequate if students' basic skills reached the level of the syllabus. In other words, as one of the Post-Basic Education teachers claimed, the grade 11 and grade 12 course books are suitable, but, because the students lack the basic skills, they cannot cope with and meet the Post-Basic Education syllabus requirements.

Another reason for using the teacher-centred approach may be that many Post-Basic Education teachers' work on a part-time basis. They are also often untrained or have little experience in teaching the Basic Education syllabus. These teachers are undoubtedly more concerned with finishing the syllabus and are largely heedless of the teaching approach they use. A third explanation for using a teacher-centred approach can be the extra or unexpected holidays that oblige all teachers, especially those who teach grades 11 and 12, to finish the syllabus because of the exam. It seems that a gap exists between the curriculum department, educational stakeholders and the teachers who apply the curriculum (Ministry of Education & World Bank, 2012). In this regard, Al-Jardani (2011, as cited in Al-Jardani, 2012) has claimed that,

[A] lack of a framework for Curriculum Evaluation in the Ministry of Education in Oman for the public has been observed. This has resulted in a miscommunication between the curriculum departments and the practitioners in the field. Building and publicising a framework helps to show the role and responsibility of each in developing and evaluating the curriculum. (p. 40)

The learning objectives may be described well in the Ministry of Education documents, such as The English Language Framework. However, the problem lies in teachers' awareness of how to implement these goals, which, in turn, causes miscommunication between curriculum departments and teachers. Alsubaie (2016) suggests that teachers' involvement in curriculum development is essential because they are the most important actors in the curriculum

implementation process with their knowledge, experiences and competencies. Teachers are supposed to work in the educational system as active agents and develop solutions to the real difficulties or challenges they encounter in the classroom (Datnow, 2012; O'Brien, 2016). Frost (2006) claimed that if “agency” is the ability to make a difference, then making a difference can extend beyond teaching within the boundaries of the classroom. In this regard, some Post-Basic Education teachers reported participating in the syllabus revision committee. However, they also reported that the Ministry of Education takes a long time to implement suggestions, and not all recommendations from teachers are taken into consideration.

To sum up, involving teachers in curriculum evaluation, as suggested by Al-Jardani (2012), and preparing them to serve as “mediator[s] between curriculum and students” (Patankar& Jadhav, 2013, p. 4) would contribute to narrowing the gap between the MOE and higher education institutions and build a social dialogue between different educational departments for the purposes of improving teachers’ performance and more generally the education system. The MOE should view teachers as curriculum managers because “teachers play the respective role for each step of curriculum development process” (Patankar& Jadhav, 2013, p. 7).

Every year, at Sultan Qaboos University, over 3000 students are required to complete a foundation programme to pursue their studies (Ptak& Al-Kaabi, 2013). It is therefore essential to gain a better understanding of why the changes that the MOE seeks to achieve to improve the education system in general, and English language education in particular, do not appear to have had the desired impact on classroom practice. What is more, the findings of the present study raise a fundamental question: if the MOE encourages the adaptation of the curriculum to suit the students’ needs, why do teachers have to ‘finish’ the syllabus and why is this one of the supervisors’ main concerns? Why are the MOE authorities more concerned with covering the course book than with the learning outcomes? Part of the answer appears to reside in the assessment system in Oman, namely, how it is regarded and put into practice, and this constitutes another relevant theme in the present study.

5.3.2 Teaching for exam purposes

All the respondents' testimony in previous studies and the present study demonstrate that students graduate from Basic Education schools with an inadequate level of English language ability, a deficiency that requires them to complete a foundation programme. The qualitative and quantitative data revealed that Post-Basic Education teachers and students in the present study were primarily concerned with semester exams (the semester test). Students focus on memorising lexical and grammatical rules to achieve high marks, and teachers train the students to pass exams, which affects their teaching approaches. In this context, Post-Basic Education teachers and students view English only as a subject to pass, rather than as a communication tool. In this regard, in her study, Al Lawati (2002) found that teachers focused their instruction on the exams; consequently, students focused their learning on exams. It is crucial for the teachers to read and understand the learning objectives established in the curriculum framework and understand that English is not only a subject to pass but also a means of communication and a vital key to higher education that will allow students to function well in the workplace.

Nunan (1989) believes that language is a "living entity" and not a school subject which can be memorised for exam purposes. The results of the present study, as well as previous scholarship (Al-Issa, 2002; Al Lawati, 2002; Al-Toubi; 1998; Ministry of Education & World Bank, 2012; Nunan, 1989), indicate that parents, teachers and students in Oman are concerned about exams, especially in grade 12. Some parents "at best are satisfied if their children simply obtain a passing grade in English" (Al-Mahrooqi, 2012, p. 267). Others provide their children with a private tutor at home to assist them in passing exams, and "such lessons centre around training the students to answer and tackle the final exam questions" (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012, p. 151). Indeed, Al-Maskri et al. (2012) have claimed that tests, in Omani schools, are "the most dominant strategy" (p. 42) to assess students' performance. This observation may help explain why the students are more concerned about what will be included in tests than what they are supposed to achieve and learn at each level. This mindset affects their attitude toward learning English (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012; Ministry of Education & World Bank, 2012, p. 31). Therefore, the main concern of most students in the present study changes from learning English

as a communication tool that is required in higher education, as well as in the labour market, to just practising exam-type questions that will guarantee pass marks.

Teachers' and students' concern with exams confirms the results of the above researchers' studies. They all indicate that the English language is not considered as a tool for communication, as stated in the curriculum framework. Instead, English is treated only as one of many school subjects to be memorised, and students are taught that they only need to retain lexical and grammatical structures to pass exams (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012; Al-Mahrooqi, 2012). Al-Mahrooqi (2012), Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi (2012), and Al-Mahrooqi and Denman (2016) have all asserted that communication in English is one of the skills required for the workforce; however, Post-Basic Education students lack this skill.

Accordingly, teachers, students and parents need to understand that assessments should not cause teachers to pressure students and neglect curriculum materials that are not tested (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012; Al Lawati, 2002). Exams should not be students' and teachers' main concern, nor should teachers "teach to the test" (Copland et al., 2014; Ministry of Education & World Bank, 2012). It seems that two reasons for the attitude that English is only a subject to pass are the students' environment and the teachers' focus on preparing students for the end of year exams (Al-Lawati, 2002). Social psychologists claim that religion, cultural and social factors influence teachers' beliefs (Xu, 2012; Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017) which have an impact on teaching and learning a language.

In sum, assessment is a process of collecting and interpreting information about teaching and learning to enhance students' achievement and to achieve the success of educational programmes. It is to give students as well as teachers feedback about what students have learned and what they have not yet grasped, that is, it is the process rather than the product that is most important (Davies 1986; Jabbarifar, 2009). According to Rowntree (1987, quoted in Gibbs, 2010) "if we wish to discover the truth about an educational system, we must first look to its assessment procedures" (p. 4). This will have a stronger impact if, instead of focusing on the product of teaching and being limited to measuring teachers' performance and effectiveness on the basis of their ability to complete the syllabus and on students' grades, assessment takes a constructivist perspective (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) whereby the product of teaching and learning

is seen essentially as the result of a process that develops in a specific context involving Bernstein's three message systems' - curriculum, pedagogy and teacher-student interaction. Given the interactive nature of the teaching and learning process and the value-laden nature of assessment, it should involve the different stakeholders (students, teachers, families, and school authorities) thus giving classroom teachers a say and active role in the management and implementation of the curriculum, pedagogical decisions, and better provision for the students' individual needs. This is an important dimension of initial teacher training and in-service education aimed at preparing teachers to become autonomous professionals who are accountable to their students and society in general, and to promote their awareness of, and interest in, meeting the claims for social dialogue as expressed by the participants in the present study.

5.4 The training and professional development of English teachers in Oman

Almost all of the participants' responses in the present study indicated that Post-Basic Education students reach grades 10, 11 and 12 with inadequate English language proficiency due to a weak foundation in all competencies learned in the preceding school levels, namely in C1 and C2. One reason proposed by different groups of participants is the lack of preparation by C1 and C2 teachers. These teachers do not prepare their students to achieve higher levels of education.

The responses indicate that all the participants reported that C1 and C2 teachers do not have enough experience to prepare their students to pursue higher education. It appears that students complete C1 and C2 with very limited language (restricted code) that does not allow them to make their ideas and intentions explicit. (Bernstein, 2003a; Bernstein, 2003b; Cause, 2010; Zhao, 2014). This finding is in line with Wa-Mbaleka's (2014) observation that, due to the weak foundation of English in schools (K-12) and an extremely limited number of colleges and universities offering TESOL academic degrees, some English teachers are unqualified, and some have fossilized errors in their own knowledge of English, which can be easily transferred to their students. In support of Wa-Mbaleka's (2014) observation, Souriyavongsa et al. (2013) described how the student participants in their study stated that English teachers were not well trained and consequently students lacked an adequate foundation of English knowledge. This result is in line with Al-Mahrooqi's (2012) findings that "teachers in the lower grades are often very weak in English" (p. 265).

Based on the above findings and my own experience, there is a need for dialogue between C1, C2 and Post-Basic schools, and between Post-Basic schools and the higher education institutions. From my experience, few, or no class visits are arranged between teachers in different schools to study why students from grades 1 to 10 have low levels of proficiency in the English language. Teachers' involvement in negotiating this problem would play an important role in achieving educational goals (Ratteree, 2012; Vere, 2007).

However, in the Omani context, one possible explanation for the weakness of teachers in the lower grades is that, before the 1990s, no compulsory professional development courses existed for newly appointed teachers (Al-Ani, Al-Barwani& Al-Balushi, 2012). As a result, it is not surprising that teachers are not well-prepared. On the other hand, because of rapid changes in the educational system, the MOE has provided different types of in-service training for all teachers at various levels to update their knowledge of a variety of pedagogical theories as well as of teaching and professional skills (Ifunanya et al., 2013; Lal, 2016).

According to the Ministry of Education (2013), since 2012, the Ministry of Education has offered more professional development programmes and increased the budget for professional development to over 7 million Omani Riyals. The Ministry of Education also offers teachers a programme aimed at equipping them with the skills needed to conduct action research (Al-Jardani, 2012; Al-Shabibi & Silvennoinen, 2017). However, previous research and policy documents (Issan& Gomaa, 2010; Ministry of Education & World Bank, 2012) have indicated that these in-service training courses are designed for short periods and do not have a sufficient impact on teachers' practice. The courses are too theoretical in nature and have failed to address teachers' real problems and requirements (Al-Shabibi & Silvennoinen, 2017; Ministry of Education & World Bank, 2012).

Similarly, it seems that pre-service training in higher education institutions is inadequate. It has been found that graduate teachers in Oman encounter difficulties dealing with the English course books taught in public schools even after they have graduated because they lack proper academic and professional training (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012; Al-Mahrooqi, 2012; Al-Maskri et al., 2012; Al-Shabibi&Silvennoinen, 2017; Al-Tobi, 2006). For instance, at Sultan Qaboos University, student-teachers begin teaching practice one day per week in their seventh semester

and two days per week in their eighth semester (Ministry of Education & World Bank, 2012). Student-teachers find no association between the real situation of teaching and teacher preparation. Moreover, the literature demonstrates that teacher training programmes at Sultan Qaboos University and in the wider Arab world fail to provide an adequate balance between the theoretical and practical dimensions and teaching (Al-Issa, 2008; Al-Shabibi&Silvennoinen, 2017).

The issue of how teachers learn and how much they benefit from learning theories and research, as well as what the relationship is between research, practice and teaching, is debatable (Grosua, Almăș ana & Circaa, 2015; Kennedy, 1999; Nassaji, 2012). Grosua et al. (2015) suggest that “it is not easy to find proper answers to the questions raised within this topic” (p. 2). To bridge the gap between theory and practice, Nassaji (2012) advocates the involvement of teachers in investigating their own practice by conducting action research or even exploratory practice on topics relevant to educational problems. This research should be self-initiated, according to Lankshear and Knobel (2004, as cited in Patsko, 2015), and it can be conducted collaboratively.

Moreover, Gray (2002) believes that teachers must participate in “educational research and development from their first education courses” (p. 1). He adds that when teachers begin their jobs with research awareness and work in a collaborative teaching environment with more experienced colleagues, they can integrate research into their practice. This means that training programmes at higher education institutions in Oman should prepare a “teacher-researcher” (Gray, 2002, p. 3) who can achieve effective teaching practice and continuous professional development through classroom research.

On the other hand, factors exist that constrain or prevent teachers from becoming researchers. Among these factors are: (1) that teachers themselves are not competent to conduct research due to a lack of professional training; (2) insufficient budgets and a lack of reference materials and library services at some schools; and (3) teachers’ regular workload prevents them from conducting any research (Erba, 2013; Walia, 2015). Educational research is required for teachers’ professional development and students’ processes. Thus, teachers should be trained and provided with enough time and resources to conduct research on their subjects.

Furthermore, professional development is associated with the teachers' attitudes towards and interest in teaching (Thomas, 2008), which has a direct influence on students' development. In this respect, Johnston and Ahtee (2006, as cited in Abu Hilal, Al Dhafri, Kharousi, & Al Kilani, 2014) have claimed that "several authors have therefore stipulated the need to pay explicit attention to teachers' attitudes toward teaching, apart from improving their pedagogical content knowledge and competencies in their field of teaching" (p. 8). As a senior supervisor, I have witnessed some teachers' lack of interest in continuous professional development by considering training days as a 'day off' from teaching. Attendance lists have indicated that some teachers do not turn up for in-service training or, as Issan and Gomaa (2010) stated, they see in-service training as a "hit and run" (p. 26) activity with no time for real practice or application.

Some teachers have no desire to teach or to think about professional development; their behaviour will negatively affect students' progress and achievement. In this regard, Laxmi (2016) has claimed that teachers' attitudes have the potential to make a positive difference in students' lives. Therefore, stakeholders and decision-makers in the Recruitment Department of the Ministry of Education in Oman must bear in mind that some teachers are not interested in teaching or have been 'forced' to work as teachers because teaching offers a guaranteed job for almost all those who apply, in addition to an attractive salary and long holidays regardless of their interest in teaching as a career (Al-Ani et al., 2012; Al-Shabibi & Silvennoinen, 2017).

Many Omani teachers graduate from overseas universities and colleges. The Ministry of Education requires them to take a formal examination in their subject area which is administered and checked by qualified staff at Sultan Qaboos University. Since 2006, English teachers in Oman have also been required to have an International English Language Testing System (IELTS) score of Band 6 or an equivalent Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) score from a recognised test centre for accepting them as full-time teachers. During the MOE interviews, the teachers are informed that they may be assigned to teach anywhere in the country according to the governorates' needs (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012; Al-Issa et al., 2017; Ministry of Education, 2013).

After all, newly appointed teachers have been deployed; they join induction programmes that last for several days. These programmes focus on classroom teaching and learning practices as well

as the demands of the curriculum and the process of assessments (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012; Al-Shabibi & Silvennoinen 2017; Ministry of Education, 2013). Prabowo (2015) has claimed that teachers are not assigned to schools according to their proficiency or competencies, or to the skills that enable them to understand students' needs, but rather; they are assigned according to each school's needs.

According to the Ministry of Education and the World Bank (2012) and Al-Shabibi (2013, cited in Al-Shabibi & Silvennoinen, 2017), newly qualified teachers reported that they were dissatisfied with the induction courses, which started at the beginning of the year before teachers had begun teaching, and experienced challenges. Teachers reported that they had problems in the areas of classroom management, assessment of students' performance, workload pressure, time management and the accommodation of individual students' differences. Thus, it seems vital to listen to teachers' voices as another source of data to better understand the factors that contribute to students' low level of English language proficiency when they finish Post-Basic Education.

In my professional career as a senior supervisor, I have encountered many teachers who chose their career because they wanted a job or were forced to join the College of Education because they did not complete Post-Basic Education with the high grades required to pursue other areas of study, or they encountered other circumstances such as parental influence. On the other hand, some teachers are passionate about teaching as a career and hope to build a better nation. Thus, a period of probation could be useful to assess teachers' interests and attitudes toward teaching.

5.5 Inter-institutional dialogue – a gap to be filled

Lack of communication between post-basic schools and higher education institutions was a common theme in students' and teachers' testimony. All Post-Basic Education and Language Centre teachers and a large number of students involved in the present study reported a lack of communication between schools and higher education institutions, which causes miscommunication between departments and practitioners in the field (Al-Jardani, 2012). According to Al-Najar (2016b), there is a "poor communication partnership between the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (HE) institutions" (p. 12) which supports the

argument that this disconnectedness causes students to be inadequately prepared for the transition from Post-Basic Education to higher education.

The responses collected from the interviews and the questionnaire in the present study indicate that it is important to share education decisions such as the learning objectives, the content of the curriculum and the assessment issues more widely with those who are in the field (the common message systems: curriculum, assessment and pedagogy) (Cause, 2010). Teacher participants in the present study showed their willingness to have ‘rich’ communication and collaboration between the Ministry of Education and higher education institutions to discuss and share ideas about educational issues such as training, assessment and exchanging visits between MOE departments and higher education institutions. Unlike the previous studies, the present study involved the teachers’ voice to provide tangible examples of how building social dialogue can play an important role in enhancing students’ achievement through having qualified teachers. That is, having contact and communication between higher education institutions and Post-Basic Education schools will serve to improve pre-service teacher preparation and the in-service continuous professional development of teachers. This communication, for instance, would help to enhance the level of pre- and in-service training that some research (Al Shabibi & Silvennoinen, 2017; Al Toubi, 1998; Ministry of Education & World Bank, 2012) has criticized by obtaining continuous feedback from the student-teachers, and the teachers, on teachers’ needs in the field and how they can overcome the difficulties they encounter in the classes.

Also, social dialogue may highlight the most important area of difficulties that students encounter when English becomes the language of instruction, as in Al-Seyabi and Tuzlukova’s (2014) study. For example, the findings from of Al-Seyabi and Tuzlukova’s (2014) study that university students use different writing skills, such as brainstorming, whereas school students focused mainly on revising English grammar and its structures, may require curriculum designers to reconsider the writing skills that students have or practise in the Post-Basic Education schools in grades 11 and 12 and develop more writing skills in the Post-Basic Education syllabus in order to answers students’ needs at higher education. That is, students at Post-Basic Education schools do not only need to construct correct grammatical sentences and use the right vocabulary, they also need, for instance, to learn how to convey the meaning to the

reader. It has been remarked that social dialogue “can serve as the ‘glue’ for successful education reform, enabling a full involvement of teachers, who are on the front lines of implementing new learning policies and approaches, to help design what is likely to work” (Ratteree, 2012, p. 15). Thus the present study has gone beyond students’ perspectives and has involved the perspectives of teachers’ who play an important role in implementing educational policies.

From the above discussion, it seems that a genuine communication gap exists within the educational system. It may be necessary to develop intra-curricula evaluations (Patankar & Jadhav, 2013) so that teachers and students can evaluate one another as well as the materials, teaching methods and outcomes. It is also essential to establish a solid communication bridge between higher education institutions and the MOE.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the most important factors that can cause students’ low levels of language proficiency as well as their inadequate to pursue higher education level without a foundation programme. The analysis of the collected data reveals that there is a general agreement among Post-Basic Education teachers, Language Centre teachers and the students, that students graduate from school with a low level of English language proficiency because they are not well prepared at the early stages, C1 and C2. Teacher participants in the present study assume that the early school stages influence students’ achievement and lifelong learning. The analysis of the participants’ responses in the interviews and in the questionnaire indicates that Post-Basic Education teachers’ approaches play an important role in students’ inadequate to pursue higher education level without a foundation programme. Students believe that teachers’ concern with rote memorisation and using the course book did not prepare them to study at higher education institutions. On the other hand, LCT and PBETs advocated that students’ low proficiency of English language hinders them from coping with Post-Basic Education materials. Besides, this chapter discussed how English language teachers’ needs for training and continuing professional development is one of the important factors that causes students’ low levels of language proficiency.

The findings of the present study reveal that teachers' performance in C1 and C2 were not adequate to prepare the students to pursue their higher education studies. Furthermore, the lack of communication, or poor communication, between higher education institutions and the schools, also affects students' achievement and performance. This fact was also confirmed by the results of the 2-tailed independent samples *t*-test and the ANOVA test that were presented in Chapter 4, indicating that all students in all the areas of studies and from the different governorates believe that teachers' performance and lack of social dialogue are crucial factors. That explains, in part, why the phenomenon under study remains the same across the country, that is the national level and across areas of study.

The benefits of having social dialogue would be twofold: it would provide an opportunity for the MOE and the higher education institutions to gain a better understanding of the potential and main weaknesses of grade 12 graduates and to find better ways to facilitate students' transition from the secondary to the higher education learning environment. Educating well-prepared and qualified teachers that schools need to enhance the students' language abilities cannot be achieved without effective communication between Basic Education schools and higher education institutions. Enhancing the social dialogue between schools and higher education institutions to exchange teaching strategies, approaches and to solve students' problems is also needed, as this cannot be singlehandedly achieved without effective communication between schools and higher education.

Chapter 6

6.1 Introduction

First-year students encounter multiple challenges as they move from schools to higher education institutions. Students find that they need to adjust themselves to new learning styles and academic course requirements; they must acquire skills that help them to cope with university life (Byrne & Flood, 2005; Hillman, 2005). One challenge that Omani diploma students encounter while transitioning to higher education institutions is that English is used as the medium of instruction in almost all higher education institutions, and this affects their academic performance (Al-Bakri, 2013; Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012; Al-Mamari, 2012; Al-Seyabi & Tuzlukova, 2014; Issan & Gomaa, 2010; Ismail, 2011; Oxford Business Group, 2013; Sergon, 2011; Sivaraman et al., 2014).

This chapter discusses the conclusions that can be drawn from the research findings. It begins by presenting a brief overview of the research problem, the aim of the research, and its applied approaches. It also includes a summary of the findings, their implications and resulting recommendations, limitations of the research and suggestions for further research.

6.2 Problem statement and study objective

The present study aimed to explore why learning English for twelve years in Omani public schools is inadequate preparation for Omani students to pursue studies at higher education level.

6.3 Study aim and approaches

I sought to investigate the reasons why learning English for twelve years in Omani public schools is inadequate preparation for Omani students to pursue studies at higher education level from the perspectives of the different groups who are directly involved in the teaching and

learning process: Post-Basic Education teachers, Language Centre teachers and students. I used a mixed methods approach to achieve the aim of the present study and to minimise my direct influence, as a senior supervisor at the Ministry of Education, on the findings (Subedi, 2016). Using a mixed method sequential exploratory design (Creswell, 2006a; Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007) also allowed me to collect data from multiple sources (teachers and students) to gain a better understanding of the research problem. This approach and my use of different tools including, interviews and a questionnaire, allowed me to ensure the integrity of the findings. The combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches and the use of different data sources allowed me to overcome the potential limitations of using only a single approach. Having data from two different sources gave me confidence about the findings and helped to minimise the impact of bias. Using a mixed method approach provided a comprehensive view of the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2009; Gay & Mills, 2016; Johnson et al., 2007; Terrell, 2011).

In Phase I (the qualitative phase) three different interview protocols were used with three different groups: (i) students who had finished a foundation programme after completing public Basic Education at school for 12 years; (ii) Post-Basic Education teachers; and (iii) Language Centre teachers. For Phase II (the quantitative phase), a questionnaire was developed based on the relevant literature and the qualitative findings of phase I.

6.4 The findings of the study

Before discussing the implications of the findings and recommendations, it is appropriate to summarise the results of the present study. The findings of the present research highlight some reasons that may help to explain why learning English for twelve years in Omani public schools is inadequate preparation for Omani students to pursue studies at higher education level. These factors can be summed up as follows:

- (a) Students' low level of English proficiency when transitioning from Basic Education to Post-Basic Education. As the qualitative and quantitative data revealed, Basic Education students transferred from Cycle 1 to Cycle 2 and Post-Basic Education

with inadequate language proficiency, which negatively affected their performance in higher education classes.

- (b) The teachers' approach to the teaching and learning of English at Post-Basic Education level. The results suggest that, despite the fact that the Ministry of Education has reformed the educational system, moving from the General Education System to the Basic Education System to emphasize the learner's active role in the learning and teaching process and to adopt a student-centred approach, the majority of PBETs still use a teacher-centred approach in the teaching of English. This can be explained in part by the teachers' main concern with covering the syllabus and preparing students to meet exam requirements, and their inability to manage the curriculum in such a way as to meet the curriculum demands while also providing for the students' needs as users of English for communicative and academic purposes.
- (c) English teachers' needs for training and continuing professional development. As explained in Chapter 5, both pre-service and in-service training were criticized for being theoretical, designed for short periods and for not having sufficient impact on teachers' practice (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012; Al-Mahrooqi, 2012; Al-Maskri et al., 2012; Al-Shabibi & Silvennoinen, 2017; Issan & Gomaa, 2010; Ministry of Education & World Bank, 2012).
- (d) An absence of inter-institutional dialogue between Post-Basic schools and higher education institutions was one of the causes highlighted by both Post-Basic Education and Language Centre teachers. The lack of communication causes students to be inadequately prepared for the transition to higher education level and it causes miscommunication between departments and practitioners in the field (Al-Jardani, 2012; Al-Najar, 2016a, 2016b).

My study confirms Al-Jardani's and Al-Najar's research findings. Additionally, the findings in my study were based on concrete evidence from two different sources (teachers and students). Besides the fact that my study confirms previous results, it is significant because it reinforces some previous findings with the inclusion of the Post-Basic Education teachers' point of view. Moreover, in my study, I highlight an important aspect of student assessments that may explain

why students desire a foundation programme. The weight given to semester tests (70%) necessitates that students learn English only for the purpose of the exams.

The implications of this study relate primarily to four groups: the Ministry of Education, Post-Basic Education teachers, students, and parents. Parents are the first teachers who influence students' learning, achievement and progress (Bonci, 2008; Close, 2001).

6.5. Implications

The findings of the present study can have implications at different levels of the education system: at the macro level, the findings of this study may be of interest to the educational authorities, namely the Ministry of Education. At the micro-level, a number of implications can be discussed concerning the training and professional development of teachers, the assessment of students, and the parents' awareness of the importance of English for the academic and professional life of students.

6.5.1. Implications for the Ministry of Education

One possible measure to ensure the quality of teaching would be the implementation of a teaching license programme that requires teachers to sit for an exam every five years. This programme would motivate teachers to pursue professional development (Kamoonpuri, 2014). What is more, an effective professional development programme should be developed, based on an analysis of the need to “inspire teachers to be proactive, reflective professionals who take ownership of their own professional development” (Caena, 2014, p. 35). Stimulating teachers occasionally with material or nonmaterial incentives (European Commission, 2013) can motivate them to “learn to teach and teach to learn” (Thomas, 2008, p. 75).

6.5.2 Implications for Post-Basic Education teachers

The appraisal report used in Oman to conduct annual reviews of teachers has been in place for a long time. Even so, teachers' annual appraisal reports are not seen as powerful evidence to motivate teachers to seek continuing professional development and help them improve their practices because they do not provide specific feedback about performance. Isoré (2009) has claimed that teacher evaluations are supposed to ensure teachers' ability to enhance students' learning as well as improve teachers' practice by identifying their strengths and weaknesses for professional development.

Teachers should receive feedback on their performance through peers, school principals or self-evaluations to identify how to improve their teaching. Students' evaluations of teachers can provide insights about the instructors and lead to improved teaching. However, students' evaluations alone are not sufficient. They should be used in conjunction with other assessment tools, such as peer assessments and self-assessments (Johnson, 2012; Murray, 2005).

Furthermore, Isaacs (2003) has stated that "teacher evaluation is a vehicle for providing the feedback, direction, and supervision needed to assist teachers in successfully redesigning their craft" (p. 4). The purpose of the evaluation is not to criticise, but to develop, because the quality of teaching and student outcomes depends on teachers' level of professionalism (Abu Hilal et al., 2014).

Concerning teachers' training and professional development, the findings of the present study suggest the relevance of the implementation of a probation year that can serve two main purposes. It can serve a formative purpose by providing novice teachers with support and guidance from experienced teachers during the probation period. Additionally, it can serve an evaluative purpose concerning teachers' attitudes toward an interest in teaching as a career. This probation year would make it possible to distinguish teachers who are interested and qualified for those who are not.

Some may argue that adding assessment tools to the Ministry of Education's appraisal forms would place an additional burden on teachers and educational authorities such as supervisors. However, the evaluation reports used in the past appear to have had no impact on teachers' professional development. As Al Yahmadi (2012) explains,

Instructional leaders in the Sultanate of Oman value the process of teacher evaluation and considered it as a helpful means of assessing teachers and assisting them in fulfilling their duties. However, in-depth follow-up interviews, cross-questioning, and profound dialogue with them, it was obvious that the evaluators are unsure regarding the achievement of these purposes in the current system, as they intended. They are sceptical if the evaluation can noticeably improve the teacher's professional development. (p. 744)

To raise the teachers' level of professionalism, it is critical to conduct some workshops that facilitate their access to, and understanding of, theoretical discourse. It is also necessary to develop teachers' reflective abilities so that they become more skilled and are able to examine and legitimate their own theories-in-use in the light of their espoused theories (Argyris, 1991) and wider public theory. The findings of the present study highlight the importance of conducting a national survey to diagnose teachers' professional needs. As suggested by the findings of the present study, one area relevant to the in-service education of English teachers is the English Language Curriculum Framework; not only for grades 11 and 12, but also for grades 1 to 10. Teachers need to understand the general objectives stated in the English Curriculum Framework and the learning objectives in the English course book and syllabus thoroughly, to select appropriate approaches, strategies and materials that suit their students' needs. Understanding and appropriately implementing general learning objectives is the responsibility of both the Ministry of Education and Basic Education teachers.

Moreover, the findings of the present study suggest that senior teachers at Basic Education schools should have less classroom work so they can mentor novice and less experienced teachers more effectively (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012). Senior teachers taking on excessive work probably has an adverse effect on their professional development. Additionally, the MOE should motivate teachers to attend professional development training with various incentives (European Commission, 2013; Kamoopuri, 2014).

6.5.3 Implications for students

According to the Ministry of Education and the World Bank (2012), national assessments indicate that learning performance is below the expected level:

A series of sample-based national assessments of grades 4, 7 and 10 carried out by the MOE indicated low student achievement at all grades tested. The grade 7 assessment, for instance, found that most students did not reach the standard expected by the MOE. (p. 30)

Although the findings of the present study cannot be generalised at the national level, they suggest that it would be appropriate to conduct a national test to assess the progress and needs of students in grades 4 and 10 to determine whatever measures would be appropriate to implement (e.g. joining a summer course) to improve students' competences in English before pursuing studies at higher education level. This test could be conducted at the governorate level. If, in the result of future research, the findings of the present study were found to be applicable to other governorates, then it would be appropriate to introduce a national test for the entire country.

6.5.4 Implications for parents

The findings of the present study echo previous claims regarding the need to raise parents' awareness of English as not only an exam requirement but also a vital asset for employability and the pursuit of higher education (Al-Issa, 2014; Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2016; Copland et al., 2014). Because parents are their children's first teachers, they have a strong influence on students' learning (Bonci, 2008; Close 2001). According to Chang (2010, as cited in Souriyavongsa et al., 2013), insufficient parental support is one factor that causes students' weaknesses in learning English.

Souriyavongsa et al. (2013) and Sultana and Rosli (2016) have stated that parents play a positive role in encouraging and motivating their children to learn English inside and outside of school. Additionally, Yusuf (2005) has claimed that "parents who envision their children attending university need to prepare them early" (p. xiii). According to Yusuf (2005), research has demonstrated that "the parents of high achieving students are more involved in their children's

educational programmes and that parents should ensure that the subjects their children learn are challenging” (p. 4).

To summarise, many factors help to explain why Post-Basic Education students are required to complete an English foundation programme to pursue studies at higher education level. Some factors relate to approaches to teaching and learning English at the Post-Basic Education level. Other reasons are associated with teachers’ need for continuous professional development and the absence of inter-institutional communication between Post-Basic schools and higher education institutions. The findings support those of Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi (2012) and indicate a gap between the principles of the Basic Education System and their actual implementation. Addressing this gap requires on-going inter-institutional dialogue between different departments of the Ministry of Education as well as the involvement of teachers who are the cornerstone of the teaching process.

6.6 Significance for personal practice and professional development

My doctoral journey has certainly been demanding. It was full of challenges that enabled me to gain more confidence and enhance my research skills. Despite the limitations of my study, the findings will have a positive impact on my practice and professional development as well as on the English Supervision Department. These findings will be put into practice when I collaborate with trainers in the creation of professional development workshops for teachers. The findings of the present study will inform my post-lesson discussions with teachers of the different cycles. My experiences and the findings obtained from this study will allow me to compare the skills that students need to acquire current classroom practices to allow students to finish secondary school and achieve higher education success (Dzubak, 2015). The findings will likely serve as useful evidence when meeting with other departments to encourage communication and social dialogue with higher education institutions and various MOE departments.

6.7 Strengths and limitations of the study

One strength of the present study is that it provided data from various sources and used a mixed methods approach to explore why learning English for twelve years in Omani public schools is inadequate preparation for Omani students to pursue studies at higher education level. It also led to the development and validation of a scale that integrates two dimensions (teachers' performance and social dialogue), which can be used and further tested in future research. This contribution represents another strength of the present study. However, the study has also several limitations.

One limitation relates to sample size and the impossibility of generalisation of findings. I used convenience samples (Gay & Mills, 2016) for each target group in view of the availability of people to participate in the present study and the criteria for inclusion in each group. I used both qualitative and quantitative approaches to ensure the truthfulness and trustworthiness of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and to gain an in-depth understanding of the reasons behind post-basic education students' inadequate preparation in English from the different perspectives of those directly involved, including students, Post-Basic Education teachers and Language Centre teachers. However, the relatively small number of students ($n=168$) involved in the survey and the location of the study in one particular higher education institution limits the generalizability of the results to other contexts. In fact, the questionnaire in the present study was designed based on findings obtained from the interviews and the relevant literature. The main aim of the questionnaire was to complement the interviews and provide greater insight (Burns & Grove, 1993; Terrell, 2011; Rahman & Yeasmin, 2012) into the phenomenon under investigation.

The conclusions from the quantitative phase (Creswell, 2009; Gay & Mills, 2016) of the present study relate to the information provided by the respondents in the context of the present research.

Further testing and checks for the external validity of the questionnaire are required before claims can be made for the generalizability (Creswell, 2009) of its findings to other contexts. The timing of the research caused the small numbers of student participants. I was unable to

interview many students because they were busy submitting assignments and taking exams. Additionally, the questionnaire was developed and administered in August when the majority of students were on summer vacation.

Another possible limitation is my position as a senior supervisor at the Ministry of Education, as discussed in the introduction and methodology chapter. I was aware that my position might influence teachers' responses. Many teachers might not have felt comfortable exposing themselves to scrutiny by a person in a supervisory role at the MOE. In an attempt to address this issue, I reassured the Post-Basic Education teachers that they were not the target of my study and were not being evaluated. I introduced myself as only a researcher to all participants and asked for their voluntary participation in the study to identify solutions to the research problem. Although I have gained some experience and confidence in conducting my doctoral thesis, my lack of experience and research skills may be another limitation.

6.8 Suggestions for future research

Suggestions for future research can be made, based on the discussion of the survey findings, as well as on the interviews and the above limitations. Similar studies need to be conducted on a larger scale to include PBETs' at all the governorates and to explore their perspectives on students' low achievement in English as well as to identify potential solutions to address this phenomenon. Future studies should also investigate teachers' needs in terms of professional development and the type of workshops provided by other governorates. Additionally, quantitative research should be conducted with a larger sample of students from both public and private universities to gain a wider understanding of the phenomenon. Further studies need to be conducted to include other people's perspectives, such as heads of schools, teacher educators, and officials from the ministerial departments.

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Appendix 1: Interview protocol for the students

Greeting;

Ensure confidentiality and anonymity; ask permission to audiotape the interview.

Age / college

Did you do well in school? What were your favourite subjects?

What about English? How was your experience of learning English before university?

Do you think your English classes at school prepared you well for university?

What were your main difficulties with English?

How could your English classes have helped you overcome those difficulties? How could they have been better?

How did you find the foundation course?

How do you feel now with using English at university?

How was the English foundation course different from your English classes at school?

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experience of teaching English?

Appendix 2: Interview protocol for the Post-Basic Education teachers

Greeting; ensure confidentiality and anonymity; ask permission to audiotape the interview

How long have you been teaching in Post-Basic Education?

Age: 30–35 40–45 40+

In your experience, what are the main difficulties faced by students in English?

How do you usually help them overcome such difficulties?

As many of you know, many students need a foundation course after learning English for 12 years? Why do you think this is?

Do you feel you have the autonomy to adapt the curriculum to suit your students' needs?

What do you think can/should be done at the school level to get students better prepared for university?

Do you think the MOE is willing to accept school teachers' suggestions for improvement and act on it?

Is there any contact between you and the SQU tutors regarding the preparation of students to pursue studies at university?

*If Yes, could you explain how that happens.

*If No, why not? Would it be helpful? How helpful?

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experience of learning English?

Appendix 3: Interview protocol for the English Language Centre teachers

Greeting; ensure confidentiality and anonymity; ask permission to audiotape the interview.

How long have you been teaching at LC?

Why do you think students need a foundation course?

From your experience, what are the main difficulties faced by the students with English?

How is the foundation programme different from the years of English that students have previously taken in school?

In your opinion, what can be done in order for the students to be better prepared in English at school?

Is there any contact between you and the teachers regarding preparing students for high education study? Would you like such contact?

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experience of teaching English?

Appendix 4: Questionnaire for validation for the experts

Dear colleagues/ Sir /Madam

I am an EdD student at the Liverpool University conducting a study entitled

An Investigation as to why Diploma Students Require an Additional Foundation Course in English: A Case Study of Oman. For the purpose of my research I am in the process of designing and validating a questionnaire that aims to identify university students' perceptions of why they need to complete a foundation course in English upon entrance to the university after learning English for 12 years in schools.

As a means to validate the questionnaire I need to submit it to a panel of experts. Given your recognized expertise, I would be grateful if you agree to participate in the expert panel and complete the Validation Tool attached to this letter.

Please find also attached a sample of the student questionnaire.

Please feel free to suggest any modifications or addition that might help improve the instrument.

Your feedback is highly valued.

The researcher

The questionnaire aims to collect information about students' experiences as learners of English at Post-Basic Education schools regarding four main domains as follows:

1. Teacher's Role

1.1 Approaches to teaching

1.2 Rapport and understanding

2. Curriculum

3. Assessment

4. Social dialogue

Please indicate how relevant/ appropriate you consider each item to the corresponding domain

1. Teachers' role

1.1 Teacher's approach

My English teacher in Post-Basic school	Relevant	Relevant to some extent	Not relevant
1. asked me to memorize vocabulary			
2. taught me grammar rules in Arabic language			
3. taught me grammar rules in English			
4. talked to me in English			
5. encouraged me more to work in pairs and in groups to practise English			

6. encouraged me to make oral presentations			
7. encouraged me to speak English in the class			
8. encouraged me to practise projects in English (wall paper magazine, meet people, visit some places and write reports.....etc.)			
9. asked me to read different types of texts (dialogues, letters, reports, stories, instructions, etc.)			
10. used the course book to teach me English			
11. gave me extra activities to improve my English			
12. required me to do homework			

1.2 Teacher's rapport and understanding

My English teacher in Post-Basic school	Relevant	Relevant to some extent	Not relevant
13. understood my difficulties			
14. told me how English is important for studying at the university			
15. encouraged me to participate in the class			

even when I made mistakes			
16. developed a good relationship with me			
17. cared about me			

2. Curriculum

My English teacher in Post-Basic Education school	Relevant	Relevant to some extent	Not relevant
18 used different materials (videos, pictures, newspaper articles, etc.) to teach me English			
19. gave me different activities in the class (role play, simulations, etc.)			
20. introduced more interesting topics in our English lessons			
21. gave me challenging activities to do in English			
22.told me about some good websites to improve and practise English outside the school			
23. asked me to read different types of texts (dialogues, letters, reports, stories, instructions, etc.)			
24. encouraged me to use English outside the class			

3. Assessment

<i>I wish my English teacher in Post-Basic school</i>	Relevant	Relevant to some extent	Not relevant
24. trained me for the English exam			
25. explained my mistakes			
26. gave me feedback about my work			
27. told me how to improve my English			
28. corrected my writing errors			
29. corrected my speaking errors			

4. Social dialogue (relationship between schools and higher education organization)

<i>I wish my English teacher in Post-Basic school</i>	Relevant	Relevant to some extent	Not relevant
30. arranged with school administration visits to colleges and universities			
31. invited people from higher education to			

clarify our questions and inquiries			
-------------------------------------	--	--	--

Please use the space below to suggest any modifications or additions that might help to improve the instrument in terms of content and accuracy.

-----Thank you very much for your time and invaluable support.

Appendix 5: Ethical approval letter from Liverpool University

Dear Masooma Mohamed,			
I am pleased to inform you that the EdD. Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC) has approved your application for ethical approval for your study. Details and conditions of the approval can be found below.			
Sub-Committee:	EdD. Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC)		
Review type:	Expedited		
PI:			
School:		Lifelong Learning	
Title:	An Investigation as to why Diploma Students Require an Additional Foundation Course in English: A Case Study of Oman.		
First Reviewer:	Dr Lucilla Crosta		
Second Reviewer:	Dr Marco Ferreira		
Other members of the Committee	Dr Anthony Edwards, Dr Martin Gough, Dr Trish Lunt, Dr. Janet Strivens, Dr Jose Reis Jorge		

Date of Approval:	1st October 2015			
The application was APPROVED subject to the following conditions				
Conditions				
1	Mandatory	M: All serious adverse events must be reported to the VPREC within 24 hours of their occurrence, via the EdD Thesis Primary Supervisor.		
<p>This approval applies for the duration of the research. If it is proposed to extend the duration of the study as specified in the application form, the Sub-Committee should be notified. If it is proposed to make an amendment to the research, you should notify the Sub-Committee by following the Notice of Amendment procedure outlined at http://www.liv.ac.uk/media/livacuk/researchethics/notice%20of%20amendment.doc.</p> <p>Where your research includes elements that are not conducted in the UK, approval to proceed is further conditional upon a thorough risk assessment of the site and local permission to carry out the research, including, where such a body exists, local research ethics committee approval. No documentation of local permission is required (a) if the researcher will simply be asking organizations to distribute research invitations on the researcher's behalf, or (b) if the researcher is using only public means to identify/contact participants. When medical, educational, or business records are analysed or used to identify potential research participants, the site needs to explicitly approve access to data for research purposes (even if the researcher normally has access to that data to perform his or her job).</p>				

Please note that the approval to proceed depends also on research proposal approval.				

Kind regards,

Lucilla Crosta

Chair, EdD. VPREC

Appendix 6: Research Permission Form

The Language Centre Research Committee

Research Permission Form

The Research Permission Form: What is it & what is it not?

This Form acts as a formal document granting permission to applicants to conduct their research at the SQU Language Centre based upon the specifications indicated in Sections A& B below. Once approval is granted, the next step for the researcher will be to append this Form together with their Email Request to the LC for research support and any enclosed instrumentation to the liaison person (the individual(s) in the Unit/Programme/LC Administration who will facilitate access to the prospective participants). Please note that this Form is valid for its declared purpose only. It does not secure any form of consent for participation.

Section A: [To be completed by the researcher seeking permission to conduct research at the LC]

Researcher(s)	Masooma Talib Mohammed
Institution	Liverpool University
Research Topic	An Investigation as to why Diploma Students Require an Additional Foundation Course in English: A Case Study of Oman.
Requested permission (e.g., to distribute a questionnaire, conduct interviews/observations, etc.)	Conduct interviews
Date application is made	10/2015
Name of person(s) facilitating access to participants, if known	

Section B: [To be Completed by the LC Research Committee Chair and Returned to Concerned Researcher]

Permission Code:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Approved
LC Research Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/> Requires revision. Kind of revision required: _____
Authorizing body	Language Centre Research Committee
Date permission granted	9 November, 2015

Last updated on 09 November 2015

Appendix 7: Participant consent form – Language Centre teachers

Committee on Research Ethics

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project:

An Investigation as to why Diploma Students Require an Additional Foundation Course in English: A Case Study of Oman.

Researcher: Masooma Mohammed

Dear Language Centre teacher,

You are invited to participate in this research **Omani diploma graduates require a foundation course in English after Post-Basic Education**. This form is called the ‘participant consent form’ and allows you to understand the research before deciding whether to take part or not. You have the right to withdraw at any time during the research or to skip any question that causes you inconvenience.

The purpose of the study is to explore why Omani diploma graduates do not attain higher levels (fail) their university/college English language placement tests and require a foundation course in English although they study English from grade 1 to grade 12. Thus, the present study intends to highlight the reasons for this phenomenon from your point of view.

Please tick the initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated [/10/2014] for the above

study.

☐

2. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

☐

3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, without my rights being affected. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.

☐

4. I understand that, under the Data Protection Act, I can at any time ask for access to the information I provide and I can also request the destruction of that information if I wish.

☐



5. I agree to take part in the above study.

Committee on Research Ethics

Participant Name	Date	Signature
_____	_____	_____

Name of Person taking consent	Date	Signature
_____	_____	_____

Masooma Talib Mohammed

Researcher	Date	Signature
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Principal Investigator:	Student Researcher:
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Name	Name : Masooma Talib
Work Address	Work Address Ministry of Education
Work Telephone	Work Telephone 24664649
Work Email	Work Email masooma.mohammed@online.liverpool.ac.uk

Committee on Research Ethics

Participant Name	Date	Signature
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PATICIPATIONCONSENT FORM

Name of Person taking consent	Date	Signature
-------------------------------	------	-----------

Masooma Talib Mohammed

Researcher	Date	Signature
------------	------	-----------

Principal Investigator:

Name

Work Address

Work Telephone

Work Email

masooma.mohammed@online.liverpool.ac.uk

Student Researcher:

Name : Masooma Talib

Work Address Ministry of Education

Work Telephone 24664649

Work Email

Appendix 8: Participant consent form – Students**Title of Research Project:**

An Investigation as to why Diploma Students Require an Additional Foundation Course in English: A Case Study of Oman.

**Researcher: Masooma
Mohammed**

Dear student, (CAN BE TRANSLATED FOR THE STUDENTS IN TO ARABIC)

You are invited to participate in this research **Omani diploma graduates require a foundation course in English after Post-Basic Education**. This form is called the 'participant consent form' and allows you to understand the research before deciding whether to take part or not. You can withdraw at anytime you like during the interview or skip any question that cause you inconvenience.

The purpose of the study is to explore why Omani diploma graduates do not attain higher levels (fail) their university/college English language placement tests and require a foundation course in English although they study English from grade 1 to grade 12. Thus, the present study intends to highlight the reasons for this phenomenon from your perspectives.

Please tick the initial box

☐

1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated [/10/2014] for the above study.

☐

2. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, without my rights being affected. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.

☐

4 I understand that, under the Data Protection Act, I can at any time ask for access to the information I provide and I can also request the destruction of that information if I wish.

☐

5. I agree to take part in the above study.

☐

Appendix 9: Participant Information Sheet for Post-Basic Education teachers

Title of Study

An Investigation as to why Diploma Students Require an Additional Foundation Course in English: A Case Study of Oman

Version Number and Date

Version 2 25/92015

Invitation Paragraph

You are kindly invited to participate in this research study. Before you decide whether to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being conducted and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and feel free to ask me if you would like more information or if there is anything that you need to understand. Please also feel free to discuss this with your colleagues and/or relatives. I would like to stress that you do not have to accept this invitation and should only agree to take part if you want to. The researcher must get an authorized letter from the Ministry of Education to facilitate her tasks in schools and any other organizations. The letter is in Arabic and will be translated and attached later.

Thank you for reading this.

What is the purpose of the study?

The primary purpose of the study is to fulfil the requirements of a doctoral thesis for the researcher. The objectives of the study will be to better understand the reasons why Omani diploma graduates continue to need additional foundation courses in English even after having completed 12 years of English.

The aim of the study is not to evaluate your performance. It is to support the researcher to find the reasons for the above described phenomenon. My role will be only that of a researcher and not a senior supervisor.

Why have I been chosen to take part?

You have been chosen to take part because you are a teacher of Post-Basic Education teaching grade 12 for five years. Newly appointed teachers are excluded as they do not have not sufficient teaching experience for the purposes of this research.

Do I have to take part?

Not at all, your participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time without incurring any penalty or disadvantage.

What will happen if I take part?

If you agree, you will be interviewed for not more than one hour, by me, a doctoral student researcher, in a quiet and comfortable place (which could be the school library or Learning Resource Center BUT not in the teachers' room). I would like to audio record our conversation, so that I have an accurate record of our conversation, but you can choose not to be recorded (but I need to take some notes). At no time will I use your name, to ensure complete anonymity. After the interview, I will transcribe the recording, or if no recording is made, write up my notes of our conversation and send it for you to review for accuracy. You may make suggestions for changes and then send back your approval of the transcription or notes.

Expenses and / or payments

There is no any reward you might get or money when you participate in this study except my verbal appreciation and thanks.

Are there any risks in taking part?

There are no anticipated risks. Your name will not be recorded, special codes will be used for the purposes of the organization and to distinguish among participants immediately after the interview. Further, all information gathered in this study will be anonymised and all identifiable information will be removed. The school's name will not be mentioned during the interview and will not be mentioned in my study. The interview will take place in the Learning Resource Center or school library, but never in the teachers' room.

Are there any benefits in taking part?

No personal benefits, but your participation will help to explore why many Post-Basic Education graduates need a foundation course after learning English for 12 years at school. Your suggestions and recommendations will be sent to the decision makers as part of the study results, as an executive summary. No identifiable information will be included in the study remarks.

What if I am unhappy or if there is a problem?

The University has a complaints procedure that is open to you. If you are unhappy about any element of the study, please contact the research participant advocate on liverpoolethics@ohecampus.com. When contacting them, please provide details of the name or description of the study (so that it can be identified), the researcher(s) involved, and the details of the complaint you wish to make.

Will my participation be kept confidential?

Yes, as your name will not be mentioned during the interview and a pseudo code will be used to organize the transcripts and recordings. The transcript of data recording will be saved for five years along with the electronic recording. No one other than the researcher will hear or use the recording. It will be saved in my personal laptop which is password protected and kept securely.

A thematic analysis will be conducted on the anonymized transcripts.

What will happen to the results of the study?

You have the right to know the results in advance or to have a free copy of my thesis. The study or results might be published in educational magazines BUT in an anonymized manner. All identifiable information on participants will be removed.

What will happen if I want to stop taking part?

You can withdraw at any time, without explanation and with no consequences.

Who can I contact if I have further questions?

My contact information:

Masooma Talib Mohammed

Telephone: 99340540

Email: masooma.mohammed@my.ohcampus.com

The contact details of the Research Participant Advocate at the University of Liverpool are:

001-612-312-1210 (USA number)

Email address liverpooethics@ohcampus.com

Please keep/print a copy of the Participant Information Sheet for your reference. Please contact me and/or the Research Participant Advocate at the University of Liverpool with any questions or concerns you may have.

Printed Name of Participant

Date of consent

Participant's Signature

Researcher's Signature

Appendix 10: Participant Consent Form – Post-Basic Education teachers

Committee on Research Ethics

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project:

An Investigation as to why Diploma Students Require an
Additional Foundation Course in English: A Case Study of Oman.

Researcher

Masooma Mohammed

Masooma Mohammed

Dear Teacher,

You are invited to participate in this research: **Omani diploma graduates require a foundation course in English after Post-Basic Education**. This form is called the ‘participant consent form’ to allow you to understand the research before deciding whether to take part or not. You have the right to withdraw at anytime during the research or to skip any questions that cause you inconvenience.

The purpose of the study is to explore why Omani diploma graduates do not attain higher levels (fail) their university/college English language placement tests and require a foundation course in English although they study English from grade 1 to grade 12. Thus, the present study intends to highlight the reasons of this phenomenon from your perspective.

Please tick the initial box

I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated [/10/2015] for the above study.

☐

I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

☐

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, without my rights being affected. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.

☐

I understand that, under the Data Protection Act, I can, at any time, ask for access to the information I provide and I can also request the destruction of that information if I wish.

☐

I agree to take part in the above study.

☐

Committee on Research Ethics

_____	_____	_____
Participant Name	Date	Signature

PARTICIPATION CONSENT FORM

Name of Person taking consent	Date	Signature
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Masooma Talib

Researcher	Date	Signature
------------	------	-----------

Principal Investigator:

Student Researcher:

Name

Name : Masooma Talib

Work Address

Work Address Ministry of Education

Work Telephone

Work Telephone 24664649

Work Email

Work Email

masooma.mohammed@online.liverpool.ac.uk

Appendix 11: Participant information sheet for Language Centre teachers



Title of Study

An Investigation as to why Diploma Students Require an Additional Foundation Course in English: A Case Study of Oman

Version Number and Date

Version 2 27/9/2015

Invitation Paragraph

You are kindly invited to participate in this research study. Before you decide whether to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being conducted and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and feel free to ask me if you would like more information or if there is anything that you need to understand. Please also feel free to discuss this with your colleagues and/or relatives. I would like to stress that you do not have to accept this invitation and should only agree to take part if you want to. The researcher must get an authorized letter from the Ministry of Education to facilitate her tasks in schools and any other organizations. The letter is in Arabic and will be translated and attached later.

Thank you for reading this.

What is the purpose of the study?

The primary purpose of the study is to fulfil the requirements of a doctoral thesis for the researcher. The objectives of the study will be to better understand the reasons why Omani diploma graduates continue to need additional foundation courses in English even after having

completed 12 years of English. **The aim of the study is not to evaluate the performance. It is to support the researcher to find the reasons for the above-mentioned phenomenon.** My role will be only that of a researcher and not a senior supervisor.

Why have I been chosen to take part?

You have been chosen to take part because you are a tutor at The Language Centre a university, teaching the foundation course for five years. Tutors with less than five years of experience are not included in this study.

Do I have to take part?

Not at all; your participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time without incurring any penalty or disadvantage.

What will happen if I take part?

If you agree, you will be interviewed for not more than one hour, by me, a doctoral student researcher, in a quiet and comfortable place of your choosing. I would like to audio record our conversation, so that I have an accurate record of our conversation, but you can choose not to be recorded (but I need to take some notes). At no time will I use your name, to ensure complete anonymity. After the interview, I will transcribe the recording, or if no recording is made, write up my notes of our conversation and send it for you to review for accuracy. You may make suggestions for changes and then send back your approval of the transcription or notes. The interview can be done in your office or in one of the library rooms where no one can enter.

Expenses and / or payments

There is not any reward you might get or money when you participate in this study except my verbal appreciation and thanks.

Are there any risks in taking part?

There are no anticipated risks. Your name will not be recorded, special codes will be used for the purposes of the organization and to distinguish among participants immediately after the

interview. Further, all information gathered in this study will be anonymised and all identifiable information will be removed **except the university's name as it is the only public university we have in Oman. However, the college name will not be mentioned at all.**

Are there any benefits in taking part?

No personal benefits, but your participation will help to explore why many Post-Basic Education graduates need a foundation course after learning English for 12 years at school. Your suggestions and recommendations will be sent to the decision makers as part of the study results, as an executive summary. No identifiable information will be included in the study remarks.

What if I am unhappy or if there is a problem?

The University has a complaints procedure that is open to you. If you are unhappy about any element of the study, please contact the research participant advocate liverpoolethics@ohecampus.com. When contacting them, please provide details of the name or description of the study (so that it can be identified), the researcher(s) involved, and the details of the complaint you wish to make

Will my participation be kept confidential?

Yes, as your name will not be mentioned during the interview and a pseudo code will be used to organize the transcripts and recordings. The transcript of data recording will be saved for five years but the electronic recording (if one is generated if you agree) will be erased after you have had an opportunity to review and approve of the transcript. No one other than the researcher will hear or use the recording. It will be saved in my personal laptop, which is password protected and kept securely.

A thematic analysis will be conducted on the anonymized transcripts.

What will happen to the results of the study?

You have the right to know the results in advance or to have a free copy of my thesis. The study or results might be published in educational magazines BUT in an anonymized manner. All identifiable information on participants will be removed.

What will happen if I want to stop taking part?

You can withdraw at any time, without explanation and with no consequences.

Who can I contact if I have further questions?

My contact information:

Masooma Talib Mohammed

Telephone: 99340540

Email: masooma.mohammed@online.liverpool.ac.uk

The contact details of the Research Participant Advocate at the University of Liverpool are:

001-612-312-1210 (USA number)

Email address: liverpoolethics@ohcampus.com

Appendix 12: Participant Information Sheet for Students

Printed Name of Participant

Date of consent

Participant's Signature

Researcher's Signature



Title of Study

An investigation as to why many Omani Diploma graduates require an additional foundation course in English after Post-Basic Education

Version Number and Date

Version 1 24/9/2015

Invitation Paragraph

You are kindly invited to participate in this research study. Before you decide whether to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being conducted and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and feel free to ask me if you would like more information or if there is anything that you need to understand. Please also feel free to discuss this with your colleagues and/or relatives. I would like to stress that you do not have to accept this invitation and should only agree to take part if you want to. The researcher must get an authorized letter from the Ministry of Education to facilitate her tasks in schools and any other organizations. The letter is in Arabic and will be translated and attached later.

Thank you for reading this.

What is the purpose of the study?

This study is being used to fulfill one of the requirements for the EdD degree at the University of Liverpool by the researcher who is interested in exploring the reasons behind the students' need for a foundation course after 12 years of studying English.

The purpose of the study is to explore why many Omani diploma graduates do not attain higher levels (fail) their university/college English language placement tests and require a foundation course in English although they study English from grade 1 to grade 12. Thus, the present study intends to highlight the reasons for this phenomenon from your (student's) perspectives. **The aim of the study is not to evaluate your performance since my role as researcher will be separated from my professional one as senior supervisor. The aim is to support the researcher in finding the reasons for the above-mentioned phenomenon.**

Why have I been chosen to take part?

You have been chosen to take part because you are 18 years of age or older, a student who has completed 12 years of Basic Education and an additional foundation course in English. Students who did not complete the foundation course are excluded.

Do I have to take part?

Not at all, your participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at anytime without incurring any penalty or disadvantage.

What will happen if I take part?

If you agree, you will be interviewed for not more than one hour, by me, a doctoral student researcher, in a quiet and comfortable place within the campus of the university. We will be ALONE in one of the library rooms. I would like to audio record our conversation, so that I have an accurate record of our conversation, but you can choose to not be recorded. At no time, will I use your name, to ensure complete anonymity. After the interview, I will transcribe the recording, or if no recording is made, write up my notes of our conversation and send it for you to review for accuracy and you will be attributed a number so that you will not be recognized. You may make suggestions for changes and then send back your approval of the transcription or notes.

Expenses and / or payments

There is not any reward you might get or money when you participate in this study except my verbal appreciation and thanks.

Are there any risks in taking part?

There are no anticipated risks. **Your name will not be recorded**; special codes will be used for the purposes of the organization and to distinguish among participants immediately after the interview. Further, all information gathered in this study will be anonymized and all identifiable information will be removed. Only the university's name will be mentioned, but not your name or your college's name. **If you feel distressed during the interview you can have a short break.** Please remember that you are not being evaluated. Instead, you are participating in solving the above-mentioned phenomenon. **Do not worry about the language. I am here to hear from you not to correct you.** I have the Arabic version (translated) of the interview question; please do not hesitate to utilize it.

Are there any benefits in taking part?

No personal benefits, but your participation will help to explore why Post-Basic Education graduates need a foundation course after learning English for 12 years at school. Your suggestions and recommendations will be sent to the decision makers as part of the study results, as an executive summary. No identifiable information will be included in the study remarks.

What if I am unhappy or if there is a problem?

The University has a complaints procedure that is open to you. If you are unhappy about any element of the study, please contact my supervisor Dr Joes Reis at José Reis Jorge josemanuel.reisjorge@online.liverpool.ac.uk. You can also contact the Research participant advocate: liverpoolethics@ohcampus.com or 001-612-312-1210 (USA number). When contacting them please provide details of the name or description of the study (so that it can be identified), the researcher(s) involved, and the details of the complaint you wish to make.

Will my participation be kept confidential?

Yes, as your name will not be mentioned during the interview and a pseudo code will be used to organize the transcripts and recordings. The transcript of data recording and the electronic recording will be saved in my laptop which is password protected; and kept securely for five years. No one else will hear or use the recordings at all. A thematic analysis will be conducted on the anonymized transcripts.

What will happen to the results of the study?

You have the right to know the results in advance or to have a free copy of my thesis. The study or results might be published in educational magazines BUT in an anonymised manner. All identifiable information on participants will be removed.

What will happen if I want to stop taking part?

You can withdraw at any time, without explanation and without incurring any penalty or disadvantage.

Who can I contact if I have further questions?

My contact information:

Masooma Talib Mohammed

Telephone: 99340540

Email: masooma.mohammed@online.liverpool.ac.uk

The contact details of the Research Participant Advocate at the University of Liverpool are:

001-612-312-1210 (USA number)

Email address: liverpoolethics@ohecampus.com

Please keep/print a copy of the Participant Information Sheet for your reference. Please contact me and/or the Research Participant Advocate at the University of Liverpool with any questions or concerns you may have.

Printed Name of Participant

Date of consent

Participant's Signature

Researcher's Signature

Appendix 13: The questionnaire for the students

Dear Student,

You are kindly invited to participate in this research study and spend some time to answer this questionnaire. The questionnaire is designed to collect information that will be used for the purpose of a study that I am conducting in order to fulfill one of the requirements for the EdD degree at the University of Liverpool. This study aims **to explore the reasons why diploma students need to take a foundation course after studying English for 12 years in government schools.**

Please be assured that your answers will remain anonymous and confidential. Your contribution will certainly help the researcher to better understand the case mentioned above and to find possible solutions. Please do not sign the questionnaire in order to ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

Please tick (✓) the box below to show your agreement.

I have read the **invitation part** above and I agree to participate in this study. ☐

The questionnaire is about your experience of learning English when you were a student at school (general education/Post-Basic Education). **It consists of three parts:**

In **Part One** of the questionnaire, you are asked to provide some general information about your academic status.

In **Part Two** and **Part Three**, you are asked about your experience as a student of English in a Post-Basic school.

Part One – General information

Gender : Male ☐

Female ☐

College: _____

Region where you studied grade 11-12 Post-Basic:

I started my foundation course with level: **1 2 3 4 5 6** (please circle one)

I completed **my Post-Basic Education** at one of the **government** schools in the Sultanate of Oman. Yes / No (*Please circle your answer*)

I **completed** my foundation course at the University. Yes / No (*Please circle your answer*)

Part Two

Please Tick (✓) the appropriate box to indicate how often each of the following situations happened when you were learning English at school.

	<i>My English teachers in the Post-Basic school...</i>	<i>Always</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Never</i>
		<i>5</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>
1	asked me to memorize vocabulary					
2	taught me grammar rules in Arabic language					
3	taught me grammar rules in English					
4	talked to me in English					
5	encouraged me more to work in pairs and in groups to practise English					

6	encouraged me to make oral presentations					
7	encouraged me to speak English in the class					
8	encouraged me to practise projects in English (wall paper magazine, meet people, visit some places and write reports.....etc.)					
9	asked me to read different types of texts (dialogues, letters, reports, stories, instructions, etc.)					
10	used the course book to teach me English					
11	gave me extra activities to improve my English					
12	required me to do homework					
13	understood my difficulties					
14	told me how English is important for studying at the university					
15	encouraged me to participate in the class even when I made mistakes					
16	developed a good relationship with me					
17	cared about me					

18	used different materials (videos, pictures, newspaper articles, etc.) to teach me English					
19	gave me different activities in the class (role play, simulations, etc.)					
20	introduced more interesting topics in our English lessons					
21	gave me challenging activities to do in English					
22	told me about some good websites to improve and to practise English outside the school					
23	encouraged me to use English outside the class					
24	trained me for the English exam					
25	explained my mistakes					
26	gave me feedback about my work					
27	told me how to improve my English					
28	corrected my writing errors					
29	corrected my speaking errors					
30	arranged with school administration visits to colleges and universities					

31	invited people from higher education to clarify our questions and inquiries					
32	arranged with school to invite undergraduate students to talk about their experience					
33	invited university teachers to observe his/her lessons					

Part Three

Please answer the following questions providing as much details as you can. Please note that there is no right or wrong answer. All your answers will be much appreciated.

You can complete this section in Arabic if you feel this enables you to express yourself better.

Please list the main reasons why you needed the foundation course after learning English for 12 years.

What were your main difficulties with English in grades 11 and 12?

In your opinion, what could be done (at school) to prepare students better in English for university/ college level?

_____ *cooperation is highly appreciated. Thank you for your participation.*

Masooma